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How African American Men from Challenging Backgrounds Beat the Odds and Graduated from College

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Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

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Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

Department of Psychology

HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN FROM CHALLENGING BACKGROUNDS
BEAT THE ODDS AND GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE

By Valisha Terry

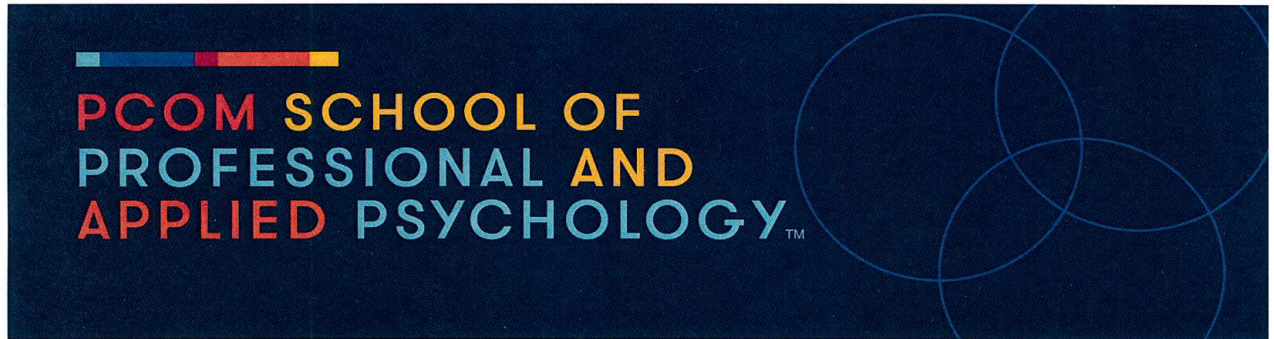
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Psychology

April 2019

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL



DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the thesis presented to us by **Valisha Terry**, on the 14th day of March, 2019, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology, has been examined and is acceptable in both scholarship and literary quality.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURES

Chairperson

Chair, Department of School Psychology

Dean, School of Professional & Applied Psychology

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First and foremost, to God be the glory! Giving all honor and praise to my Lord and Savior who continues to bless me to no avail. To my mom, thank you for your love, support, investment, and the many sacrifices you have made; I am forever indebted to you. My accomplishments are yours. My father, the words you have instilled in me about education and doing the “right thing” will remain with me forever; I work hard to make you proud. To my lover, mentor, and friend “Joey”: you are my person. You inspire me to reach the stars, dream bigger, and tackle what’s mine. You constantly push me to set aside my doubt and leave my comfort zone. I can’t thank you enough for your love, devotion, and help. When I think of exceptional I think of you and that in itself forces me to level up. Valon, you are the best part of me; I am blessed to be your mom. To my amazing dissertation committee, Drs. Virginia Salzer, Katy Tresco, and Ilene Vermes. Thank you for your encouragement and support throughout this journey.

This work of art is dedicated to the memory of my cousin Anton who lacked the resources, will, and fortitude to beat the odds of a life filled with so many obstacles. I came up with this topic with you in mind, as well as all the other little black boys whose lives are filled with so much adversity. It will always be my hope to do the work as a catalyst for change. To the exceptional black men, I have had the privilege of talking to personally and those I view from afar, your resiliency encourages me to strive for the unimaginable. I thank you for helping to create different narratives that will permeate society and compel many to change their perceptions and stereotypes of black males. You all have proven to be successful just by overcoming the many obstacles that have been designed to break you and as always, you rang supreme.

Abstract

While Bettis and Sternod (2009) asserted the notion of boys being in crisis as not a new phenomenon but a historically cyclical one, present research contends that African American men are one of the most at-risk groups in the United States. School and criminal-justice systems show similar results. African American men continue to lag in terms of graduation rates and college enrollment, while being overrepresented in victim violence and the criminal justice system. They also lead the nation in homicides as both victims and perpetrators. Despite these obstacles, many at-risk African American men graduate from college and excel in life. A variety of protective factors contributes to their progress. While the reasons for failed progress and risk factors are saturated within the research, there remains few outlets that focus on protective factors that have helped many African American men. As such, this study explored and identified protective factors that have contributed to the progress of successful African American men in hopes of aiding others in their community in overcoming risks and embarking on a more successful path.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The plight of African American men remains an area of interest for scholars. The research addresses internal and external forces that prevent full positive engagement in society for African American men. Several scholars have associated the dilemma of African American men with a lack of academic success, disparities in education, low social economic status, high unemployment, and over incarceration (Clark, Flower, Walton, & Oakley, 2008; Hawkins & Kempf-Leonard, 2005; Paschall & Hubbard, 1998; Foluke, 2001). These factors are believed to be contributory of what scholars deemed as “endangered species” or an under-crisis group, often failing to focus on the many African American men who have achieved success despite obstacles.

African Americans have a history of valuing education (Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007). For many, schools have been viewed as a protective factor and instrumental in helping African Americans to develop the self-efficacy needed to achieve academically (Holcomb, 2007). A college degree is reviewed as an even more viable benefit for society as it can result in an increased economic tax base, reduced reliance for social services, and a host of benefits to oneself. Individual benefits from higher education include enhanced career mobility and security, social networks, employment skills, and increased earning potential. These examples illustrate the tangible significance of achieving successive levels of education. Many African American men enroll in colleges and universities; with the goal of enhancing their social and economic mobility, graduating from college, and exceling in life (Johnson-Bailey, Ray, Lasker-Scott, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Despite insurmountable risk factors, many African American have completed college. Bailey and Bradbury-Bailey (2010) report that only approximately 40% of African American students enroll in a school of higher education or some type of program among the small number who graduate. As the desolate representation of African American men in college has been noted by numerous researchers (Harper, 2006a & Strayhorn, 2008a, 2010) at only 5.18% of total postsecondary enrollment, Bush and Bush (2010) note community colleges serving as a primary pathway into education for African American men. The largest proportion of African American men 33.2% are enrolled in community colleges. The distribution of African American men by institutional sectors suggest that public two-year colleges serve as a primary revenue of access into postsecondary education. Still there are more than three million African American men enrolled in colleges and universities around the nation (Lee, 2000). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provide a large level of access to postsecondary education for African American men as more than one hundred thousand men are enrolled in these institutions. HBCUs are defined by federal law as colleges and universities with a mission focus on serving African Americans established prior to 1964 (Lee, 2000).

African American men face greater challenges than their peers. The research acknowledges select characteristics of African American men in postsecondary education, including background characteristics and environmental pressures that have been shown to influence outcomes for African American men. Age has been shown to be an important consideration in success as being younger was a positive predictor of

persistence (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007). Generation status is also thought to be a consideration that influences success as first generation students are less likely to succeed than student's who parents have earned a college degree. Strayhorn (2008) reports that first-generation students typically have limited cultural and social capital needed for success in academia. While college-educated, parents are more likely to provide intellectual stimulation within the home and more likely to prepare them for higher education. Moreover, the majority of African American men in college are independents which may involve a level of external responsibility with collegiate commitments. Financial barriers were also found to be a negative predictor of African American success in college (Mason, 1998). This illustrates that various forms of capital whether financial or social, are highly correlated and often not accessible to African American men.

Purpose of Study

This study intends to set a positive tone, often neglected in the research, in its discussion of how at-risk African American men can successfully complete college and make extraordinary contributions to society despite various obstacles. The study attempted to explore and identify the protective factors that contribute to the progress of successful African American men. These identified protective factors are intended to aid future generations of African American men in overcoming risks and embarking on a more successful path.

The study identifies multiple considerations that exist before admittance and/or entrance to college. There are a host of components, including but not limited to, parental involvement, community dynamics, education, and psycho-social detriments that are

relative to the African American male experience. These components are addressed in detail. This qualitative study consists of interviews with various successful African American men who have completed college. The interviewees discussed attributes to their participation in college and success. The study investigated these attributes to determine the presence of common themes among participants. The study outlined risk components and provided protective factors that will increase the knowledge of the experiences of African American men.

Definitions

Blue ribbon high school. high school recognized for academic excellence.

College graduate- completion of a 2 or 4-year program at a college or university

At-Risk. exposed to one of the following conditions/situations: low socio-economic status, non-blue ribbon or low performing school, and/or single-parent/guardian upbringing.

Low socio-economic status or poverty. Annual income of 24,000 or less with a family composition of 4 or more people.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

General Introduction

African Americans have been systemically perceived as less equal (Noguera, 2003). Parent-adolescent conflict, behavior control, expectations, and responsiveness have been linked to outcomes including psychological well-being and academic achievement among African American youth. African American men face a comparable difference in risk experiences and more obstacles in their efforts to achieve. There are a host of risk experiences that result in a significant amount of variation in academic achievement and overall success for African American boys and men. Research proposes a number of factors that are related to those risks (Robinson, 2012; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Varner & Mandara, 2014).

Parental Involvement. Recent Census Bureau figures reveal that the percentage of African American families having two parents has continuously fallen since the 1990s. A majority of African American boys are being raised by single mothers (Robinson, 2012). Astone and McLanahan (1991) found that growing up in a single-parent home had a significantly negative impact on a student's educational achievement, including negative consequences for grade point average, school attendance, and high-school completion. Parental involvement has also been identified as a significant predictor of college enrollment, as a number of studies have linked it with schooling outcomes (Kim & Schneider, 2005; Perna & Titus, 2005). Similarly, Engberg and Wolnaik (2010) showed parent contact to positively impact the likelihood of a student attending a 4-year college.

It is suggested that marital status can also have a direct impact on parental involvement as added resources may allow more time and energy to devote to a child. Varner and Mandara (2014) suggest that African American children raised in households with both parents are more balanced in levels of responsiveness and behavior control. Although single mothers are charged with having the same interest and willingness as married parents to help their children with educational, parents who possess large quantities of human capital are in a better position to invest in their children (Robinson, 2012).

Parent Relationships. Differential socialization in terms of parent relationship accounts for the large achievement disparities between African American adolescent males and females. Varner and Mandara (2014) concluded that reducing differential parenting could aide in narrowing gender differences in achievement among African American adolescents. African American mothers engage in more behavioral control with daughters than with sons, monitor female adolescents more, and give females more rules regarding curfews and dating. African American mothers have higher expectations for girls for future academic and professional success (Varner & Mandara, 2014). These differences in maternal beliefs and expectations could contribute to differences in academic self-beliefs and achievement in males compared to females.

The differences in parenting may be due to higher expectations as African American males underperform females throughout the educational pipeline as they have lower grade point averages, standardized test scores, graduation rates, and college matriculation (Smetana and Gaines, 1999). Societal trends of higher educational attainment among African American women and higher rates of incarceration among

African American men may also lead to mothers having lower expectations of their sons. Another possible theory suggests that African American mothers provide more warmth and affection for their sons, while holding more expectations for their daughters (Varner & Mandara, 2014). Still, in some ways the research is mixed, as Smetana and Gaines (1999) found middle-class African American mothers of boys are found to engage in more conflict with their children about schoolwork and homework than mothers of girls. Concern about protecting boys from racial discrimination contributes to them punishing boys more frequently (Smetana & Gaines, 1999). Hence, parenting has been linked to outcomes of psychological well-being and academic achievement among African American youth.

Parenting Styles. Research contends that the same parenting style has different effects in different cultures. Baumrind's parenting styles was first established in 1967 describing the range of parenting styles. Baumrind's three parenting styles model included authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian. Both authoritarian and authoritative patterns are strict relative to the permissive pattern of parental authority (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). Kooraneh and Amirsardari (2015) saw Baumrind's parenting styles as significant predictors of early maladaptive behavior. However, Sorkhabi and Mandara (2013) noted that parenting styles affect cultures differently. Variations in parenting styles and practices are due to variations in value systems. For instance, in authoritarian practices, African American children showed more positive characteristics and were less negatively impacted than other cultures. Hence, there are protective effects and benefits of authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles for African Americans,

including good child behavior, higher grades, self-sufficiency, and independence (Sorkhabi & Mandara 2013).

Community Dynamics

Low Socio-Economic Status. Educational attainment is directly tied to a family's economic and social stability and socioeconomic status. Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, and Chen (2012) revealed significant achievement gaps in reading and mathematics for a cohort of African American and White boys who were predominately from low-income households. The gap achievement effect sizes were similar to those found at the national level for economically-disadvantage boys enrolled in large public school districts. Socio-familial risks, including child maltreatment, economic disadvantage, and low maternal education were related to the poorest academic outcomes for African American boys. Raver, Roy, Pressler, Ursache, and McCoy (2016) suggest that epidemiological studies show low-income, ethnic minorities represent a major obstacle for the successful navigation of children as a result of social and academic demands in their neighborhoods and schools. It has been argued that African American male youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are considered to be more vulnerable because of disproportionate higher reports of classroom adjustment problems. Furthermore, youth in low socioeconomic neighborhoods are less exposed to prosocial adults and peers and high-risk neighborhoods present fewer resources to support positive efforts to combat problems (Thomas, Caldwell, & Jagers, 2016).

Paschall and Hubbard (1998) proposed that neighborhood poverty might increase stress and interpersonal conflict among African American families as well as decrease adolescents' levels of self-worth. In addition, Raver, Roy, Pressler, Ursache, and McCoy

(2016) proposed that chronic exposure to poverty-related adversity from early to middle childhood predicted higher levels of internalizing symptomatology even after controlling for initial poverty status and early internalizing symptoms in preschool. Higher exposures to adversities related to living in poverty are associated with alterations in parasympathetic, emotional, and behavioral response among stressor-exposed children. Raver (et al 2016) found that early intervention for low-income children is effective in producing more profiles of resilience.

SES is often linked with the availability of insurance to defray the costs of private mental health and substance abuse treatment; it is also connected to financial resources to purchase such services as alternative education, legal assistance, therapy, and tutoring. Studies using court records, police files, and other records of delinquency have made a strong case to support the relationship between SES and juvenile delinquency. SES disadvantaged adolescents are often processed through the system to make them eligible for treatment at the state's expense, while those from more affluent families can purchase services on their own (Hawkins & Kempf-Leonard, 2005). These factors support the impact of family stress and the effects of poverty on psychosocial development and predisposition for violent behaviors (Paschall & Hubbard, 1998).

Chronic Exposure to Violence. The environment in which one develops is often noted as having a significant impact and influence on well-being. African American boys are more likely and at higher risk for witnessing violence than boys from other racial groups. African American boys in poor, urban contexts are directly affected by their neighborhoods and more probable to develop related difficulties such as exposure to violence (Thomas, Caldwell. & Jagers, 2016). Despite the epidemic of violence among

young African American men, very few studies have examined the etiology of violence from an ecological perspective proposing that adolescents' propensity for violent behavior is a function of societal constraints. African American male youth from disadvantaged communities have the highest rates of exposure to community violence. African American boys in poor neighborhoods are more likely to develop difficulties such as victimization experiences and exposure to violence (Thomas et al 2016). Gaylord-Harden, Zakaryan, Bernard, and Pekoc (2015) emphasized that economically disadvantaged communities have significantly higher rates of community violence translating to increased exposure of African American men to violent experiences, even as perpetrators. Thus, suggesting that the effects of poverty are mediated by stressful life events there by influencing their propensity for violence.

The economic and social burden of community violence for African American men involves elevated rates of incarceration and homicide (Gaylord-Harden, Zakaryan, Bernard, & Pekoc, 2015). Adolescents exposed under these conditions may feel vulnerable and think of their neighborhood as unsafe. Community victimization is reported to be the most detrimental to youth's psychosocial functioning leading to aggressive behavior and emotional numbing that is likely to facilitate aggressive responses. Youth who live in high-risk neighborhoods tend to view the world as unpredictable and dangerous often responding to fear and feelings of vulnerability based on internalized attributions (Thomas, Caldwell, & Jagers, 2016). Youth who continue to live in such neighborhoods may resort to violence to avoid possible victimization or as retribution (Fagan, Horn. Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007). Intervening resources such as supportive parents and positive neighborhood role models may increase self-confidence

and avoid violent behavior. Parental behaviors such as communication may aide in offsetting negative effects in neighborhoods. Thomas, Caldwell, and Jagers (2016) report that African American boys' may feel safer in their neighborhood if they feel supported or have high self-efficacy to violence.

Early life adversity undoubtedly has significant long-term effects. Chronic violence exposure and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can lead to long-term psychological, emotional, and behavior problems. ACEs also have implications for problematic parenting and unhealthy parent-child attachments (Steele, Bate, Steele, Dube, Danskin, Knafo, Nikitiades, Bonuck, Meissner, & Murphy, 2016). ACEs can threaten a youth's development and well-being, contributing to many risk-taking behaviors (Brown & Shillington, 2017). Steele et al (2016) found that ACEs correlated with parenting distress and were significantly higher than in the low socioeconomic status community group. Findings showed that childhood exposure to trauma predicts higher level of parental stress. ACEs were noted as a risk factor for the continued intergenerational transmission of unhealthy parent-child attachments. Moreover, the role of ACEs was reported to increase the risk of both offending and victimization found in a range of criminological and psychological theories.

Education

Educational System. The achievement gap for boys is matched by a comparable difference in risk experiences that result in a significant amount of variation in reading and mathematics achievement for African American boys. African American boys who experienced one to three risks demonstrated significantly lower reading and mathematics achievement when compared to those having no-risk experiences. In schools, African

American boys have the highest rates of detention, suspensions, expulsions, and special-education placements (Harvey & Hill, 2004). Improving academic achievement and reducing the achievement gap between white and minority students, particularly African American boys, has been a part of national legislation and reform efforts. Despite advances, African Americans men have faced formidable systemic challenges to their educational development. African American boys face challenges specific to them as students at all levels of schooling by way of their cultural identity and the devaluation of their identity (Robinson, 2012).

African American male students are more likely to be labeled with behavior problems, suspended, and expelled. Behavioral difficulties in the classroom, particularly in the form of overactive, aggressive, and disruptive behavior present challenges for educators (Thomas et al, 2009). Also, they have been noted to be less intelligent, and more likely classified as intellectually disabled or learning disabled than other male students. In turn, they are excluded from rigorous classes and prevented from accessing educational opportunities. African American boys are also overrepresented in underfunded schools. Schools serving this population are more likely to employ teachers with less experience and lower levels of education (Brady, Winston III, & Gockley, 2014). Children in these schools generally receive inferior services and often have unmet basic needs (Noguera, 2003).

Concern that African American boys are falling behind can be observed in a number of ways. The transition to middle school was noted to be vulnerable time, which presents multiple challenges for African American and Hispanic students' academic and social adjustment. Xie, Farmer, and Cairns (2013) noted various changes that may

attribute to the challenges, which include the dynamics of the school such as larger schools and different classroom organizations. Schmidt (2008) noted that African American boys were likely to pick up cultural traits that get in the way of their success.

Social aspects, including fewer positive teacher-student relationships and increased level of academic competition have been documented along with significant changes in friendships, peer group affiliations, school social networks as well as an increase of stricter academic standards. These factors seen as contributable to the documented decline in academic or achievement test scores during the transition to middle school. The aforementioned changes may also lead to higher levels of aggression as this has been shown to be increasingly associated with higher social status in peer networks of middle school students. As there is a stronger association between aggression and popularity status in middle school as peer support for aggression and deviant behaviors increase (Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2013).

According to Foluke (2001), it is argued that school rules are inherently objective and racially unbiased while school discipline practices are also disproportionately enforced against males. It is proposed that the school sanctions are not a result from the severity of the transgressions, but instead of the view of the attitudes and behaviors of African American boys as pathological, threatening, and intimidating. Foluke (2001) contended that students, who resist or fail to conform with the design of white middle-class values as though to be imprinted in schools and academic curriculum, are branded as troublemakers and tracked into remedial education.

Only 21% of African American high school graduates met college readiness benchmarks in 2011 in reading and mathematics established by the American College

Testing organization, corresponding with 62% White, non-Hispanic youth (Warde, 2007). Although the national graduation has increased to 52% percent in 2009-2010 from 42% in previous years, only 52% of African American males graduate from high school compared to 78% of white males. The Schott Foundation for Public Education proposed that it would take 50 years for African American males to secure the same graduation rate as white peers. A number of studies and reports have focused on a disconnection of African American males and institutions of higher education revealing alarming trends regarding undergraduate enrollment and graduation. A notable decline exists, often attributed to a host of factors including disproportionately high incarceration rates, lack of academic preparation in in underperforming high schools, and poverty. Hence, institutions of higher education should be aware and have a greater understanding of the factors that contribute to the hurdles of both enrollment and graduation (Warde, 2007).

According to Collier (1998) “One of the most controversial issues currently facing educators in public school districts throughout the United States is the identification and referral of culturally and linguistically different children for placement in special education programs” (Collier p.1). The disproportionate placement of these students in special-education programs is reflective of a greater percentage than their actual percentage for the school population as a whole. The issue of disproportionate identification of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) student placed into special education was brought to the nation’s forefront through two cases alleging the inappropriate placement of culturally and/or linguistically diverse children in special-education programs (*Diana v. California*, 1970 and *Larry P. Riles* 1972). The impact of these two cases resulted in the requirement that students be assessed in their native

language when feasible and in a non-discriminatory manner. Subsequent revisions of this law continue to mandate these safeguards in addition to those pertaining to culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Research presents several components that often play a role in the disproportionate representation of CLD students in Special Education. According to Rhodes, Ochos, and Ortiz (2005), there are several factors associated with the assessment merit attention when reviewing the problem of disproportionality including inadequately trained examiners, inappropriate assessment practices, and failure to comply with federal and state guidelines. These factors influence the decision for special-education consideration and if corrected may be viable as possible solutions. Educators can help minimize the disproportionate representation of students in special education by delivering a wide range of effective, culturally sensitive educational services within the general-education program that support student learning and family involvement. These varied services should address students' and their families' unique needs and strengths, as well as their experiential, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and therefore help minimize the need for placement in special education (Ochos, Ortiz, & Rhodes, 2005).

Racial, cultural, and linguistic biases remain integral aspects of the special-education process. Many tangibles are necessary in order to influence the disproportional influx of CLD students in special education. Although this dilemma continues to persist through historical cases and groundbreaking law revisions, change still can be seen as coming one step closer to equality. It is evident that coherent and well-articulated conceptual frameworks and the need for effective advocacy to improve the educational success of minority students is vital. Continued work in the area of approaches to

measurement can offer tools by which to monitor disproportionality and can provide the basis for reform in educational policy and practice to better meet the needs of all students (Ochos, Ortiz, & Rhodes, 2005).

The challenges African American boys face in the classroom, are well documented. Noguera (2003) noted the connection between the educational performance of African American men and the hardships they endured. Despite school interventions, a number of children remain at-risk for escalating behavioral, academic, and social problems. Johnson-Bailey, Ray, and Lasker-Scott (2014) contended that invisible systems have created an education system that still denies African Americans equal access despite the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling *Brown v. Board of Education*. African American men have higher dropout rates and lower college entry and completion than any other racial or ethnic group. Urban areas, including New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Detroit, Cleveland, and St. Louis, have rates as high as 60% of African American male students failing to graduate from high school. Similar statistics are noted in higher education, as African American men are underrepresented by racial group membership in college (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2014).

Perhaps the most recognized explanation for poor academic performance is the lack of needed resources for academic success. As many fail to rectify the underlying problem and to provide pro-active solutions, Noguera (2003) proposed that schools to take actions that can reverse the patterns of low achievement among African American males. One way this could be accomplished involves studying the schools and programs that have proven successful in changing the patterns of low achievement. It is important to investigate the factors related to classroom maladjustment for those who are most at-

risk. Various examples of reforming and improving educational settings by integrating conflict resolution, social-skill training, counseling, etc. exist. These methods have worked well with particular populations in certain settings.

Student-Teacher Relationships. Environmental, social, and cultural factors also have an influence on academic performance. According to Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, and Zamel (2009), the problem in schools lies in fallacies and biases in teachers' perceptions and examinations of the behaviors of African American males is one of the factors posited to increase the risk for behavioral difficulties in the classroom. The disproportionate negative teacher expectations and perceptions for African American male youth should also be taken into account. Neal et al (2003) showed that teachers perceived African American male students with movement styles and cultural expressions to be higher in aggression, lower in academic achievement, and more in need of special-education services. As these responses may inadvertently communicate an under-valued culture, consequent maltreatment has been associated with high levels of tension between African American adolescents and their teachers in urban secondary schools. Tenebaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers held the lowest expectations for classroom behaviors and capabilities of African American when compared to students of other backgrounds. Teachers exonerate themselves in the maintenance of racial control by failing to understand how social and institutional racism pervade African American students in the classroom. As a result of teachers relying on normative assumption of African American boy's capabilities, they are tracked in lower ability, remedial, or special education programs (Allen, 2015). Hence, racial biases in teachers' perceptions and expectations may account for their disproportionate reports of behavioral adjustment

difficulties. As such, negative perceptions may adversely impact the degree of support offered within teacher-student relationship.

There is a long and persistent history of the disproportionate punishment of African American adolescents at school. Peguero et al (2016) suggests that increased school punishment may be linked to racial and ethnic minority adolescents who violate stereotypes. Research has demonstrated that African Americans are more likely to be punished at school in comparison to White Americans. Social groups or statuses and associated stereotypes are common in defining behavioral norms and expectations.

Psychosocial Determinants

Impact of Stereotypes. African American men are often viewed through stereotypical lenses. Stereotypes pose a challenge to raising healthy men. The violence and hypersexualizing of black men in films and videos can have detrimental effects. The acceptance of these stereotypes can be used to either perpetuate dominant notions of masculinity or to undermine dominant conceptions. Major and Billson's (1992) concept of the "cool pose" referring to ways of speaking, gestures, aesthetics, etc. that constitute black masculinity can be used to illustrate this point. African American men engage in attitudes and actions such as this concept to empower themselves due to a lack of institutional power (Kunjufu, 2001).

Stereotypes have become part of schooling experience due to a history of racial and ethnic stratification. The impact of stereotypes on a person who is required to complete tasks related to particular stereotypes can also be a challenge. Bordens and Horowitz (2014) propose that when a person performs a task that involves a negative stereotype for their group they will perform poorly due to the threat associated with the

task. Hence, the person develops a threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm the stereotype, referred to as stereotype threat. Steele and Aronson (1998) coined the term stereotype threat as central to understanding African American's perception about academic achievement.

According to Steele and Aronson (1998) stereotype threat is a major culprit to the underperformance of African American undergraduate students. Stereotype threat is credited as an explanation as to why capable African Americans fail to perform as well as their counterparts often receiving lower standardized test scores, lower college grades, lower graduation rates, etc. However, weaker academic identity and skills does not provide a reasonable explanation for stereotype threat (Steele 1999). Owens and Massey (2011) noted the existence of stereotype threat and its effect on academic performance through two psychological pathways. These pathways occur when individual minority group members internalize or externalize negative stereotypes about their intelligence.

African Americans follow the internalization pathway when they disassociate with academic performance to relieve the psychological distress of confirming the stereotype. This is most often achieved through a reduction of academic effort which reduces psychological impact offering another alternative to low grades instead of the perceived stereotype of inferior intellectual abilities. The externalization pathway involves minority student's belief that the majority perceives them as less intelligent and then judge the majority with envy in their performance of academic tasks. The impact of stereotype threat can be seen in the test performance of African American students. Lewis and Sekaquaptewa (2016) found that African American students who were stereotyped as

poor academic performers, scored worse than Whites on a test that was described as an assessment of intellectual ability. However, African Americans performed equally when the same test was described as non-diagnostic of intellectual ability as it reduced concerns about the implications of poor performance.

Protective Factors. Despite the aforementioned risk factors, all African American men do not succumb to negative outcomes. Although many African American men are confronted with a massive array of risks, many manage to navigate these obstacles with success. Still, little is identified as protective mechanisms that foster resilience and success for African American boys. Protective factors are categorized as internal and external strengths that reduce the negative influence of risks on outcomes (Thomas, Caldwell, & Jagers, 2016). Noguera (2003) noted the misperception in knowing less about those African American males who employed resiliency, perseverance, and coping strategies when surrounded by hardships than those who succumb and become victims of their environment. As such it is important to acknowledge the numerous protective factors that have contributed to college graduation and the success of African American males.

Harvey and Hill (2004) contend that interventions cannot just occur in school but also within the family unit. Social support within neighborhoods and connectedness are protective factors for African American boys. In terms of differential parenting, findings from Varner and Mandara (2014) support that reducing gaps in parenting may help in reducing gender gap achievement by providing empirically informed and culturally sensitive parenting interventions. Interventions beneficial to boys include awareness of

subconscious tendencies to raise sons and daughters differently and helping parts learn effective ways to respond to parenting difficulties.

Harvey and Hill (2004) examined a multifaceted Afrocentric youth and family rites of passage program that intervened with youth in various domains: individual, peer group, immediate family, extended family, and community. The Rites of Passage program offered three interventions: an after-school component, family enhancement and empowerment activities, and individual and family counseling. The after-school intervention was fostered around teaching interpersonal skills, promoting positive peer relationships, and nurturing high self-esteem among youth. The extended family intervention focused on family enhancement and empowerment sessions held as a retreat for parents and guardians to enhance parenting skills, family involvement, bonding, and cultural identity. The final intervention of individual and family counseling focused on problem solving, decision making, awareness and identification of feelings, appropriate expression, improvement of communication skills, strategies for conflict resolution, and expressing appreciation and understanding of each family member. The results of the interventions showed that youth experienced sizable increases in self-esteem, racial identity, cultural awareness, and enhanced bonding. The program also yielded positive effects on parents and guardians of the youth as there was positive statistical differences in parenting skills, community involvement, cultural awareness, and racial identity. Based off the success of the program, it is proposed that at-risk youth ascertain culturally competent interventions.

Often encouraged to be used with other support systems, mentoring has been used as an effective tool for working with at-risk adolescents. Mentoring programs that

address the unique cultural needs of African Americans as evolving from a social process and structure that includes oppression and discrimination are needed. Mentoring creates positive opportunities for collaboration, goal achievement, and problem solving.

Dependent on the need of the mentee, mentors can function in many possible roles, including advocate, teacher, counselor, role model, or source of support (Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, & Bailey, 2013).

Noguera (2003) proposed that schools take actions that can reverse the patterns of low achievement among African American males. One way this could be accomplished involves studying the schools and programs that have proven successful in changing the patterns of low achievement. It is important to investigate the factors related to classroom maladjustment for those who are most at-risk. Various examples of reforming and improving educational settings by integrating conflict resolution, social-skill training, counseling, etc. exist. These methods have worked well with particular populations in certain settings. In addition, various schools have implemented programs and curriculum suited for urban low-income males (Noguera, 2003).

Robinson (2012) revealed that single- African American mothers who expressed active attitudes, and behavior influenced their son's academic success. The mothers were deemed proactive in building skills related to their son's best interests by interacting with key people involved in their environment and teaching them positive lessons for success. The mothers encouraged and motivated their sons by building on their interests, being attentive and available. Several characteristics were apparent in the strategies used by the mothers. The most common characteristics of single African American mothers of academically successful African American boys in low-performing schools included

being a knowledgeable resource, tactful motivator, and supporter of “whole-child.”

Robinson (2012) also noted the importance in teaching skills and resources to teach their son’s how to be successful and ensure that other key people are assisting in keeping their son on a positive path. While a tactful motivator involved motivating their sons by nurturing passions and strengths and redirecting negative influences. Mothers were able to be the supporter of “whole-child” through constant monitoring and providing financial, psychological, and emotional support to their sons. There are also notable strategies implemented by single-parent mother’s that are used to influence academic success of African American boys including talking to their son regularly, surrounding sons with positive role models in the community, and addressing the root of the problem affecting their son until the problem is resolved. (Robinson, 2012).

According to Fantuzzo et al (2012), hypothesized risk and protective factors reflect three systems of influence from a developmental ecological model. Interagency collaboration at the community level can provide an understanding of the impact of publicly monitored risks. Possible opportunities to partner with school leadership to generate prevention and intervention programs to better support the education of African American boys. Enhancing family engagement within African American boy's educational experiences by improving communication between parents and teachers and providing opportunities for contribution was also found effective. Finally, opportunities to increase the academic engagement of African American boys by increasing the amount of emotional and instructional support that African American boys receive through teacher-student interactions. Also, the aid of professional development can potentially

increase understanding about how race and gender matter and provide strategies to improve interactions with African American boys.

Bush and Bush (2010) noted that African American boys and men need their own theoretical framework, which can capture their position and trajectory accounting for pre- and post-enslavement experiences while capturing spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development. Hence, the following tenets were highlighted in the development of African American Male Theory. It is proposed that the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events of African American boys and men are analyzed using an ecological approach, incorporating all interconnected environmental systems. The African American Male Theory also examines and discovers what is distinctive about the unique experience of a group and individual distinctions within the group. The theory is also built on the premises that there is a continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African boys and men. The theory posits that African American boys and men are born with an innate desire for self-determination and with an unlimited capacity for morality and with an unlimited capacity for morality and intelligence. It is also contended that racism, classism, and sexism have a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of African American males. The theory addresses the ability, capacity, and powers that people and/or systems exhibit that allow them to rise above adversity.

In the classroom, Warde (2007) noted several methods that could potentially reduce negative outcomes with risk exposure. The first method involves allowing children to vent their frustration in the beginning of the school day so that they receive immediate intervention to recuperate. Developing self-efficacy and self-esteem through

education and empowerment is thought to be another method for reducing negative outcomes. In addition to presenting African American boys with positive opportunities.

Clark, Flower, Walton, & Oakley (2008) noted strategies for increasing academic motivation, including enhancing the self-efficacy beliefs and competence, help students develop attribution beliefs, help students see task value, helps students mastery/learning goals, and help students relate to peer and school staff. These strategies could be useful for building positive outcomes in the classroom or school-wide as when the calamity fears of youth are high, their anger experience and expression were minimized. Taking on an approach that emphasizes directly assessing student needs through highlighting individual and group assets, assisting to create a positive school and classroom climate, and viewing students in theory environment and cultural context. With this approach at the forefront, an intervention group for 8th grade students yielded positive results with discipline referrals reducing greatly, improved grades, and participants became increasingly more positive about school and expressed more interest about their future. The group experience also promoted bonding among its members and reciprocated positive relationships amongst adults involved with the group (Clark et al 2008).

Schmidt (2008) asserts that professional counselors are aware that students benefit from environments that nurture positive qualities and promote protective factors. Furthermore, those who respect, listen, and attempt to understand minority experiences are more supportive and contribute to their self-efficacy and resiliency. Warde (2007) noted that family influence, role models, and mentoring are instrumental in positively affecting achievement experienced by African American boys. Promoting success also involves providing African American boys with information and access to educational

and career opportunities. Complementary, information pertaining to postsecondary education such as financial aid, available undergraduate programs, and prerequisite course work are essential (Warde, 2007).

Strong bonds to school influence better outcomes on measures of educational progress and success. High quality teachers with high expectations has been noted to contribute to the success of African American students (Noguera, 2003). Teacher expectations was noted to contribute to the academic success and the desire to further education. Students are motivated to learn when teachers encourage them. It was found that schools can promote resilience from evidence-based interventions to enhance academic engagement through the provision of emotional and instructional support. Fagan et al (2007) found that early childhood education improved reading scores, slight positive impact on mathematics scores, and reduced truancy.

Interventions that recognize black males as being active agents in their own future are successful. Johnson (2016) explored the term *somebodiness* and its meaning to African American men. *Somebodiness* was described by having a sense of personal worth and value, discovering one's purpose and making something positive out of one's life, and helping the African American community. *Somebodiness* was found to be a fundamental need for African American men which allows them to believe they are persons of worth. Ethnic pride was also seen as a protective factor that promotes positive feelings about oneself and their group conducive to a generalized feeling of positive self-regard. African American male students were noted to obtain more academic benefits from feeling connected to their ethnic group (Johnson, 2016).

The supportive relations that exist between teachers, and students were cited as an essential component for success (Noguera, 2003). Other interventions that address behavioral adjustment concerns for African American male youth in secondary schools may be improved by a dual focus on cultural identification and social problem solving. Interventions with cultural socialization that emphasizes the teaching, development, and assessment of race relations and emotional coping skills may be a response to addressing behavior concerns and providing training opportunities for school-based interventions involving African American students.

Paschall and Hubbard (1998) proposed that family environment and psychosocial characteristics may play a more important role than neighborhood-level characteristics regarding the etiology of violence. Various factors such as parental support and visible role models in communities can moderate the effects of chronic exposure to violence. Similarly, African American males are reported to be more likely to graduate with parental support and visible role models in communities who have attained education as a means of upward ability (Toldson, Harrison, Perine, Carreiro, & Caldwell, 2006). Black Male Collegians (2014) emphasized the role of African American parents being actively involved in their son's academic efforts leading to increase odds of success. More positive teacher-student relationships were also noted to be central to student behavioral adjustment and classroom success. It is proposed that culturally relevant psychological interventions consider the impact of negative images, work through the images, and redistribute more positive images that are more health and culture promoting. Best practices to engage African American males to build on their strengths is essential in reducing behavior and academic achievement difficulties, which in turn, help beat the

odds and potentially provide a pathway to college.

To conclude, publication outlets specific to the African American male experience have been published, beginning with the *Journal of African American men* (1995), *Challenge Journal: A Journal of Research on African American Men* (2007), *African American Males in Education* (2010), *Journal of Black Masculinity* (2010), and *Spectrum: A Journal of Black Men* (2012) (as cited by Noguera, 2003). These publications and continued work as this research paper indicate the value of the lives and experiences of African American males. These works contribute to the ultimately ending the “crisis” and making the exceptional more of the norm.

Need for Study

The risk factors of African American men are evident. The need to address and show that many African American men have successfully completed college while overcoming obstacles exists. Society’s messages about the inferiority of African American men influence the perception of themselves and others. More often than not, the literature has focused on the negative stereotypes and generalizations of African American men while not recognizing that under the worst conditions, they have still been able to develop a sense of dignity, self-worth, and achievement. Researchers alike seem to exclude the vast accomplishments of African American men. This research departs from the negative deficit approach of the past, instead adding to the literature focused on the resiliency and protective factors of African American men. Although many African American men confront a massive array of risks, many manage to navigate these obstacles with success. Still, little is identified as protective mechanisms that foster resilience and success for African American men. The current study demonstrates that

even after controlling for differences in parental involvement, community dynamics, education, and psycho-social detriments, significant differences for African American men exist along a variety of dimensions. Thus, it is vital that these factors be explored.

The goal of the current study is to gather specific information regarding the unique protective factors used by African American men to achieve academic success and graduate from college. A greater understanding of what it takes to beat the odds and rise above insurmountable obstacles from an African American male perspective was uncovered. The study measured protective factors by analyzing the self-report and input of participants. The study has expanded on current literature that focuses on the influence of protective factors on college completion among African American men, utilizing a qualitative, grounded theory approach. Through qualitative inquiries, this study has illustrated, contextually, the inner working of at-risk African American who have completed college.

Summary

African American men have made successful strides despite various obstacles. In order to continue and increase positive outcomes, it is important that research studies investigate protective factors that have contributed to their success. The most reliable source of information comes from African American men who achieved success despite at-risk backgrounds. Hence, the current study focused on self-reports of African American men from at-risk backgrounds who completed college. The review of literature helped to generate specific interview questions that could potentially uncover protective factors. The protective factors were identified, examined, and explored. Investigating the factors that lead to the pursuit and completion of a college education will contribute and

motivate those who are currently at-risk, ultimately, creating more positive outcomes for the African American community.

Chapter 3

Methods

The study was designed to identify and explore protective factors and attributions that contribute to college completion of at-risk African American men. The data collected has contributed in identifying salient factors that have helped at-risk African American men who have “beat the odds” and achieved success. Protective factors were viewed as characteristics that were helpful in reducing the impact of risk factors.

Research Design

The study utilized a comparative, qualitative case study design. Qualitative research is defined as inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Characteristics of a qualitative study include the collection of information through self-reports of the participants in a naturalistic setting (Corbin & Strauss 2008). This study met criteria for a qualitative study in that the findings were dependent on individual perceptions formed from the interview.

A qualitative case study design was chosen to allow for deep exploration of the topic. The African American male experience can only be captured through experiences and descriptions shared by those who have beat the odds by graduating from college. Hence, utilizing a qualitative research methodology provided the focus for a comprehensive understanding of how these selected African American men have beat the odds and prospered. Corbin and Strauss (2008) noted that this form of research allows the researcher to collect and interpret data in an interpretive and free-flowing approach. The researcher participates in interactive interviews embedded in knowledge, experience, and

literature. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to utilize natural language and human expression which is reflected in the data, analysis, and findings of the research.

Grounded theory was explored within the qualitative research design. Grounded theory is a type of qualitative analysis used to build theory from core concepts derived, developed, and integrated based on that data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The approach utilized within grounded theory is the constructivist approach of Charmaz. This approach emphasizes theory development resulting from a co-construction process which is dependent upon research interactions with participants and field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative study consisted of interviews with various successful African American men who have completed college. The interviewees discussed possible attributes that aided in their participation in college and success. This method represented an interpretative, inductive approach to the group of at-risk African American men experiences, involving the interview as the primary research instrument. The data was retrieved from the primary source of interviews and grounded in self reports. The data analysis was built on making sense of the collected data. Interview questions were constructed and refined to bring out issues most relevant. An analysis of the collected data for this study occurred through coding.

Participants

Participants were recruited from a convenient sampling. Participants were selected based on inclusion criteria: 1) must self-identify as an African American male, 2) graduated from a 2 or 4-year college, and 3) exposed to an at-risk environment. Participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to possible personal attributes and/or protective factors believed to have aided in their participation and completion in

college. The participants are from the northeastern region of the United States.

Measures (Instruments)

Survey form. The survey form was utilized to screen subjects to determine eligibility for the study. Participants had to indicate whether if they identified as African American, graduated of a 2 or 4-year college/university, met qualifications as an at-risk youth which is defined as being exposed to one of the following conditions/situations: low socio-economic status, non-blue ribbon or lower performing school, and/or single-parent/guardian upbringing.

Interview Questions. Interview questions were constructed and refined to bring out issues most relevant issues. The questions explored \ the influence of various systems, including high school experience, familial support, mentorship, college experience, and geographical location.

Procedures

1. Participants were recruited through various organizations
2. Flyers were disseminated to prospective volunteers and organizations. The flyers suggested that interested individuals contact the responsible investigator via telephone or email.
3. Once contacted, the responsible investigator informed participants of the inclusion criteria of the study and asked if the participant feels that he meets the criteria.
4. Participants were given 1 day to decide whether or not to participate.
5. Once the participant agreed to participate the interviewer scheduled a mutually agreed upon date and time to meet at a public location.

6. Consent forms were signed in person explaining the purpose of the study at the first meeting with the participant.
7. Participants were given a survey to complete to confirm that they meet inclusion criteria.
8. The interviews were completed in person. The interview began with a brief introduction, as per the script provided in Appendix D.
9. The participants were told that the interview would be audiotaped and that responses would be transcribed for further examination. Anonymity of participants was assured by assigning each interview case with a pseudonym, thus preventing the disclosure of the participants' identity.
10. The participants were reminded that the interview process will take approximately 60-90 minutes with a follow up (in-person or via email, if necessary). A follow-up was only necessary to clarify any initial responses.
11. It was reiterated to each participant that he has the right to decline any questions he does not want to answer or feels uncomfortable answering. Also, the participant was given the authority to stop the interview at any time if he did not wish to continue.
12. The participants were verbally assured the information provided will be held in strict confidence.
13. The participants were asked if he has any further questions before beginning the interview. Any potential questions that the participant had was addressed at the commencement of the interview.

14. Participants were given ample time prior to the completion of the in-person interview to ask questions, pose concerns, or add additional information not asked by the interviewer.
15. In addition, as part of the interview debriefing process, participants were asked the following question, "Are you feeling any discomfort or distress as a result of the interview?" If needed, participants were offered names of possible therapists.
16. At the completion of the in-person interview there was a question and answer session available to the participants or if the participant had any thoughts to share. The responses were also audiotaped. The participants were thanked for their participation.
17. The obtained information was transcribed, read, and re-read numerous times by the investigator. The information was coded for emerging themes and categories which were noted for further analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first level of data collection involved the collection of the initial surveys. It was determined if participants met inclusion qualifications for participation. The next level of data collection involved journaling by the investigator following the interview and transcribing audio recordings of the interview. Once all interviews were conducted data was analyzed to determine if common themes exist among participants. The responsible investigator utilized the constructivist approach while analyzing and interpreting data. The constructivist approach emphasizes diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views, and actions. The theory lies within the interpretive approach to qualitative research, and a focus on theory developed

dependent on the researcher's view. The approach also focuses on learning about the experiences within hidden networks, situations, and relationships. As such, more emphasis being placed on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, and assumptions of individuals rather than on the methods of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once interviews were completed and transcribed, the responsible investigator analyzed the material. First, the investigator contacted participants to summarize and clarify responses from the interview. All discrepancies were noted and changed. The transcribed interview was read several times by the responsible investigator. The investigator looked for similarities and differences in responses and determined whether themes exist across interviews. The themes that were identified are presented in the Results section of the study.

Summary

The study examined protective factors that influenced African American men to pursue higher education through their perspective. The two instruments that were utilized for this study include a demographic questionnaire and interview question protocol. The interview questions were developed through research as it relates to African American men, education, family, and community/neighborhood. The interview process explored the influence of various systems, including high school experience, familial support, mentorship, college experience, and geographical location. It was proposed that these systems will emerge as possible themes.

Chapter 4

Results

This study attempted to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of African American men and possible protective factors that have aided in the successful completion of a college degree. There were two instruments utilized throughout this study. A questionnaire that gathered demographic information and determined whether exposure to at-risk factors existed as well as a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The questions were developed through research regarding education, family, and community related to African American men. The audiotaped interviews lasted for approximately 10-40 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the responsible investigator.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The grounded theory approach gave participants the opportunity to present their stories as a means of providing data to promote the goal of college completion for African American men. The qualitative method utilized in this study allows this sample of the population an opportunity to be the source for data and promotion of college completion for African American men. Although this research intended to explore the positive aspects and protective factors of the participant's pursuit of higher education, certain questions brought to light some difficult obstacles that could have hindered these men from attaining their goals. The salient theme of the research was to highlight success stories in the hope of giving insight on what needs to be done to empower African American men to be successful, in accordance with the deportation from a deficit-

informed framework towards a more resiliency-focused perspective that promotes success.

Utilizing the grounded theory approach, data was collected and analyzed into relevant categories and themes. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), themes refer to categories of information developed by the investigator that are drawn directly from the data. The themes developed within this study helped generate theories as it relates to African American men from challenging backgrounds who graduated from college. Thus, there was an ongoing process of data analysis and interpretation throughout the research process.

Demographic Findings

The African American men interviewed have all at least graduated from a 2-year college and been exposed to at least one of the following conditions/situations: low socio-economic status, non-blue ribbon or low performing school, and/or single-parent/guardian upbringing. Of the 10 African American men interviewed, 9 were raised in a single-parent home, 10 were from a low socio-economic status, and 8 attended a non-blue ribbon or low performing school.

Descriptive Findings

The major sections are as follows: (a) obstacles in the school setting; (b) benefits of college; (c) family involvement in education; (d) attributes to success; and (e) advice. The participants' responses are presented under each section in this chapter. The themes of the study were formed from these sections. The following is a reiteration of the ten interviews. To protect confidentiality, the subjects have been assigned a pseudo name.

Obstacles in the school setting. In response to questions about obstacles in the school setting, most participants indicated that obstacles were related to financial difficulties which included having to take out loans and/or get a job to aide in the costs of college. Participants also reported the independence of college to be a major obstacle. A few participant's obstacles were related to race. Two participants indicated obstacles with academics.

Calvin reported both racial and academic concerns stating,

“I went to a predominantly white university where African Americans were relegated to mistreatment and minimized so I thought that that was one a second thing is that I don't think that I was adequately prepared for college academically..”

Norm noted:

“I kind of knew that I was below the eight ball because there were things there that people knew that I didn't know. I had to learn those things, number 2...it was financial, if I wanted to go to school I had to pay for it and if I couldn't pay for it I couldn't go to school at that time, I had responsibilities.”

Although Tarik's obstacles were less blatant, he identified the difficulty with the independence of college stating:

“...I guess getting used to being on your own for the first time...”

Damon reported:

“I was there 5 years so I worked a total of 4 years but my first year I didn't work so I had to work to pay for books. I would pay for different things

that I wanted and needed and help my mom out with different things that she was paying for by herself. So, I helped her out with the electric bill, gave her some money for groceries, and things like that. Another obstacle I think I guess just dealing with a different environment I came from high school that was majority white people than I got to a more diversified environment which was good for me. I don't want to say that was an obstacle but it opened eyes to how the real world really is and how I would have to adjust how I was accordingly by being in that new environment".

Bobbie obstacles were more academic based, he reported:

"I think because I didn't go to a great high school just making the adjustment to the academic life you know just adjusting to some of the academic challenges because I know my first year in college wasn't the greatest."

Tyrone touched on both racial and financial obstacles reporting the following:

"I ended up going to community before going to LaSalle for a year because my mom said she couldn't send me and my brother to college both at the same time. Then when I got to LaSalle I didn't like it, it was a whole bunch of racial stuff happening ... it was just a whole lot of underlining racism and you know it was a couple situations that we got into with a couple of our classmates then. I was an education major so like people weren't really communicating with me like I really didn't

communicate with a lot of people. I wasn't friends with a whole bunch of people because they just weren't open so I had a lot of problems..”

John identified finances and managing academics as a major component of obstacles he faced. When asked what obstacles did he face in college, he reported:

“I had many of them I'm sure one big one obviously was finance, you know figuring out how I'm going to survive this thing personally I feel like in the beginning it was discipline as far as managing academics and life on top of that ..”

Ronald's challenges were more about his racial experiences. Ronald reported the following:

“... the peer pressure in terms of your appearance you know what it means the challenge of understanding you know what it meant to be black, the misnomers that come with it just suggesting and being strong enough to stay true to myself so I think that was a huge challenge as far as I went to an HBCU so other than that I was very comfortable in my environment..”

Benefits of college. Responses under this section centered around the concept of achievement. For many, completing and graduating college was seen as the most rewarding benefits of college. Some participants saw the benefits in being involved in the success of others. This theme reiterates the importance of achievement fueled by the desire to succeed and even become a positive role model for others. When asked what was the most rewarding part of your college experience Norm reported the following:

“You feel like that degree is so far away and you get up on it and you're like I'm about to get this bad boy. I'm really about to have it like even

now I can taste it and feels daunting but I'm like I'm about to be called doctor. They about to call me doctor and it really means something not just hey what's up doc. I think it's big to achieve a thing ..the achievement of what you think behooves you and I hate to say a lot of times we believe that well we know that we have to jump some special hurdles to get any of this stuff and then you're like I jumped through them hurdles now, how you like me now".

Similarly, Damon's achievement occurred once he graduated. Damon reported:

"I was able to achieve my Master's degree while also in the same year starting in a new career path so I was able to get the Master's degree and get into a career path that I thought would benefit me in the long run".

Aaron reported the benefit of college was his ability to go on a family trip to Hawaii stating,

"I'm thinking of a time when I went to Hawaii with my family during spring vacation about 12 years ago... so, I'm having a good time not a great time but a good time.."

Kyle and Tyrone felt a sense of accomplishment through others, noting the success of their mentees. Tyrone noted:

"I think I felt the most proud when one of the kids I mentored got his MBA that made me the most proud... That meant the most to me because that was around the time when my dad was getting sick so to see him doing that made me feel good."

John's response, although different from the rest, was still centered around his achievement to do what he considered, the unimaginable. John reported:

"I was most successful after college. I pursued a full-time acting career and I began working regionally in theater until I started booking on broad way in New York, long story short I almost got casted in a film like a leading role that was the moment where I just thought that ...I made it but then I would actually say that was a moment if I'm looking back. Now though I would say now I think I have a well-balanced life which is what I've been looking for".

Ronald saw his achievement through his mother's proud eyes stating:

"About a year ago I was in my mom's living room and we were talking and she started to discuss her parents, my grandparents and we were just talking about things about my job or whatever and she looked at me and said I can't believe you're a principal she gave me this weird look and said I just can't believe you're a high school principal. I said I know she said all the things you're doing if my parents, your grandparents could just see you now they would be so proud because it would make them reflect on things that they experience, why they did the things that they did to push them. They all (parent's siblings) had to graduate from high school at the very least because you know back then you would graduate from high school and go straight into a job for the most part so and college was an option because clearly her brother, my uncle went but it wasn't like they had to but they insisted that at the very least they had to graduate from

high school it wasn't even a thought so to see me now not just to have a degree and a career but to have several degrees and also just to have you know this career in particular like she just really started to kind of get teary-eyed because she was thinking about her parents and how proud they would be so I think that's probably felt the most successful because I validated my mom's efforts I made her proud and she felt as though that I made her parents proud."

Family involvement in education. For most of the participants, family involvement centered around their mothers. Calvin summed it up by noting, "My mom was the predominant person in my education". Only one participant, Tarik, indicated that he received support mainly from his step-mom and grandmother. Overall, participants generally noted their mother in addition to a network of people including family and friends. Based on the responses generated by this theme, it can be theorized that parents, family, and friends all play vital roles in African American men completion of college.

Attributes to success. Attributes to success involved reflections on self, family/community influence, and a higher power. These factors were instrumental in leading the participants on the path to success. These factors involved individual characteristics and beliefs as well as active family and community engagement. Norm attributed his success to his belief in God and understanding and that its bigger than you.

While, Calvin knew that it had everything to do with upbringing, stating:

“I attribute my success to my culture I grew up in a culture in which success was important”.

Tarik felt some divine intervention was responsible as he reported:

“My life could have turned out so differently”.

Aaron attributed education, stating:

“I think education is one of the things for sure because it’s given me the income to do things and provide for my family and I think being around other people some friends growing up with friends that I had and friends that I had in high school and college just being around them not necessarily leaning on them but just them being there and still having friends to this day and then of course my family itself”.

Kyle identified his faith in God and upbringing stating:

“My principles I grew up upon by my mother”.

Similarly, Bobbie noted the following:

“Family values you know just some encouragement that I got from different people within the community, family members, teachers over the years.”

Tyrone replied:

“Family, friends, staying out of trouble for the most part, working hard when I need to.. Am I rich no but do I feel like I accomplished a lot I have. I’m very fortunate in like I’ve had some good jobs. I’m very fortunate that you know I’ve done things. I love to do you know mentoring is a passion

and a lot of the guys I mentored are doing very well so I do feel successful in that way.”

As John reflected he reported:

“I think throughout my education and coming of age, I think I was armed with great mindsets and ever skillsets as far as leadership and team building and resilience. I think those things have played probably a large part in my success”.

Ronald stated the following:

“Investment from a lot of people very interested in my success people you know motivated me. Being exposed to a lot of people who were successful or who just were motivating individuals who taught me various lessons. You know my family has a lot of issues with my father but they are lessons that he taught me that have really carried me through in life you know in terms of he may not have been the best role model as a man and/or a father but he taught me what it meant to be tough and independent thinking so how to be kind of street savvy when dealing with people and engaging with people too because he had the gift of gab so how to be engaging with people you know. My mom taught me empathy and caring for other people and also doing right by people and being as honest as you can. So I had brothers who did not go to college but they supported my decision and as they support everything I do in terms of saying encouraging words you know all my family like that but also the people that my mom has exposed me to in terms of she did hair for 35

years and she used her tip money to pay for my tuition you know outside of my financial aid or put the money towards my books so she would always have me come to her job or when I actually had a job in her department store and I would come see her. She would always make me engage with her customers her customers were predominately Caucasian older women so you know but that taught me how to speak with people and to mind what I say, how I say it, how I presented myself as a young man so I guess I never understood that until I got older and realized what she was trying to do you know. So, with her friends who some of them went to college so of them had been to different parts of the country whereas I mostly stayed within Camden/Philly you know these people had been places so I got a chance to engage with them I attribute my success just .. it's funny I just had a conversation this morning with a lady when I started with the school district back in 2002 and she called me and I got a chance to thank her and I wanted her to kind of share that with everyone else that was in the offices downtown when I first started working there to say thank you because I've always had a lot of people who saw me working very hard to do well and those people were invested in my success by teaching me and being open to helping and mentoring me you know point me in the right direction. So, I think I attribute all that to my mom just giving me a solid foundation, my dad weaponizing my personality to be a strong individual and using that to try to be the best person I can be and people seeing that and wanting to invest more and

more of their time and efforts into the person who I was and wanted to become”.

Advice for someone of a similar background. When asked to give advice to someone from a similar background, participants generally discussed the importance of rising above obstacles and challenges. Norm’s advice was to:

“Put all your eggs in one cart and go ahead and do it, don’t worry about whatever your background situation just go on and do it and if you fail so what you fail you just get up from that point and you keep on doing it”.

Cal thought internal and external resources would be beneficial stating:

“.. make sure they have social capital people around you who support you family capital people in your family that support you and then have internal resources that drive you forward”.

Tarik thought the following would be beneficial:

“stay positive and to keep an open mind there’s a lot more out in the world then probably what they think and to don’t fear to try stuff just try stuff...”

Aaron thought that it was important that others:

“be flexible and I’m talking about education... Be flexible in what you want to do in life because your major that you may choose may not be the one that you really want so it’s okay to change your major but then find out and ask questions about what your major is going to get you when you graduate. If you a psychology you need to get a master degree, a 4-year degree is not going to get you anywhere and also take advantage of the school resources. That’s one thing that I wish I had done more of whether

its tutoring whether its advising on internships or just during intermural volleyball take advantage of that time your education will be better”.

Kyle reported:

“patient and humble and willing to learn from someone else”

Damon reported:

“continue to set goals continue to preserve in order to achieve goals and having that determination and grit to accomplish those goals would be my ultimate advice keeping your best foot forward and accomplish your goals.”

Bobbie stated:

“your stronger than you think you are, you can achieve more than you think you know so just try to look beyond your circumstances and because things are bad now they don’t always have to be bad you can always improve your situation”.

Tyrone replied:

“Have fun, for every dollar you make save a quarter, experience the world and not just what you read in books, and make sure you got people around you that love you”.

John stated the following:

“never be afraid to speak up as far as asking for help, always think long-term as far as making decisions, spend wisely, and don’t forget where you come from and don’t forget who you are.”

Ronald felt that this was a teachable moment replying:

“I always try to focus our students around just a couple pieces of advice which is that it’s okay to be selfish in terms of thinking for yourself, making it about you and so being selfish doesn’t mean you ignore everything or that you suck the air out the room being selfish in terms of always putting yourself first because there has to be a certain point in your life where you have to start putting yourself first. You know me leaving home and knowing that I wanted to go after this degree required me to have to put myself first and insist that my parents come and help me to try and pay for this they didn’t have to I was 18 years old considered an adult 17 really but I put myself first because this is what I wanted to do. So, that’s important. I think it’s important to always know that the hardest thing you’ll ever have to do is to do the right thing. You have to kind of be your biggest advocate, you have to go after what you want and not fit anyone else’s agenda. I think that that’s a huge issue with a lot of our young men and women growing up which is that they’re so busy trying to fulfill someone else’s agenda which is why I say put yourself first and be selfish you really kind of have to be independent of thought and understand the importance of being your own advocate. So those are probably the top three things I would say to people because they’re very important our kids are highly influenced with what they see, what they read online, and with what they experience with peers every single day. I see kids make mistakes not because they believe in those mistakes but because someone else believes in those mistakes so we have to start

teaching our kids how to be independent thought in understanding that just because you're doing something wrong doesn't give me the right to respond the wrong way. So, the hardest thing you'll ever have to do is the right thing. How do you respond correctly to a situation even when someone else is doing the wrong thing that's not an easy thing to teach but our kids are trying to learn that."

Conclusion

The process used in this study was aligned with the grounded theory approach as it involved asking questions, examining the answers to the questions, comparing and contrasting the various responses, and discovering and exploring possible themes based on the premises of those responses. Each participant's response contributed to finding answers to the research questions and formulated theories. The theories were validated through the responses of the participants. Based off the answers obtained, the following theories were derived: a) Financial and academic difficulties are the most prevalent obstacles faced by African American men in the school setting. b) Obtaining a degree or sense of achievement was viewed as most beneficial. c) The support and involvement of parents, family, and friends is vital in helping African American men graduate from college. d) Many African American men attribute their success to self, family/community influence, and a higher power. e) African American men consider rising above challenges and obstacles as the most viable advice that they would give someone of a similar background.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study examined the motivational and protective factors that influenced African American men to pursue higher education. The study also identified the impact of various issues that African American men must consider before admittance and/or entry to college. Moreover, the study attempted to set a positive tone, often neglected in the research, in its discussion of how at-risk African American men can successfully complete college and make extraordinary contributions to society despite various obstacles. The interview process explored components of each participants' college and/or high school experience, support from family and community, and the influence of various systems. This chapter discusses themes that emerged from the participants' responses to questions related to their educational experiences. Limitations and recommendations for future research are also discussed in this chapter.

Review of Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative method was utilized to gather descriptive information through open-ended questions. Themes were extracted from the interview process. The qualitative method allowed the participants to present their stories as a means of providing data and an opportunity to be a source of further development. The data assisted in creating a framework, from the perspectives of the subjects, of factors that contribute to the completion of college. Grounded theory is a type of qualitative analysis that attempts to generate data by extensively exploring the underlying components, as in this study, that support the unpredicted success of African American men. Hence, the goal of grounded

theory research is to develop theories from the experiences of participants who share their experiences with interviewers (Padgett, 2009).

Themes

Several central themes relating to the proposed research questions were uncovered from the data analysis. The themes are organized according to the following board topics discussed in the study: Obstacles in the school setting, benefits of college, family involvement in education, attributes to success, and advice for someone of a similar background. Such themes uncovered from these categories included the following: (1) financial obstacles; (2) support from mother, family, and friends; (3) assistance from teachers, mentors, and other school personnel; (4) involvement in organizations and upbringing that promote higher education; (5) college as an expectation; and (6) self-motivation/self-determination.

Theme 1: Financial obstacles. Financial resources and paying for college emerged as a significant barrier. Most participants indicated the presence of financial obstacles during school. The significance of socioeconomic status may be a factor affecting scholastic success of African American males. Of the 10 participants interviewed, only 1 participant indicated a family income over \$50,000 during childhood. As discussed, lower SES is linked to higher exposure to adversities and fewer resources. The participants in this study identified with this often having to work throughout college for extra money or to offer financial support to family members.

Recommendations. Schools can offer more support for African American male students. One participant noted that his college offered African American males a full scholarship which helped significantly. In addition, offering grants for school districts

with a large population of African American boys in low socio-economic areas can be valuable. Parents could also open an education fund for their children at birth. Parents and or other family members can invest in an education fund offering yearly contributions in lieu of birthday parties/celebrations. A college fund could potentially ease some of the financial strain discussed. Parents and students should have ongoing education about scholarship and/or grants that are available starting in middle school so that they have a board range of knowledge about the scholarships/grants available.

Theme 2: Familial support. Familial support was one of the important elements identified in the study. Most participants reported that their mothers and other family members were a major source of support to them while in college. Consistent with research, familial involvement was significant in the schooling outcomes of the participants. The majority of this study's participants seemed most reliant on the support offered from their mothers or at least one or more family members. This familial support served as a source of support whether it was financial, emotional, motivational, etc. A few participants reported that familial support in some ways attributed to their success. The importance of a supportive family member reported by the participants was also, reflected in the literature.

According to Morales' study (2010), specific and explicit messages reinforcing educational goals and ambitions, as well as supportive actions from parents were key protective factors for academically resilient urban youth. Consistent with the research from this study, participants reflected on the supportive actions from family members. There were numerous responses in which participants noted the importance of having support from their mother during college. Toldson, Harrison, Perine, Carreiro, and

Caldwell (2006) reported African American males to be more likely to graduate with parental support and visible role models in the communities. It should be noted that the support of peers was found to be a factor associated with the success of African American males in college (Harper, 2006). The importance of African American men being associated with like-minded peers similarly oriented toward pursuing higher education emerged in the present research consistent with the literature. Peer support undoubtedly adds to social support and capital serving as a needed protective factor. One study that investigated the effects peers had on African American students' decisions to pursue higher education indicated that the peers with whom students spent the most time were advocates for academic engagement (Fergus et al., 2014; Holland, 2011). One participant noted that good mentors and friends, and social groups encouraged him to do well and were viable resources that helped him graduate from college

Recommendations. Schools can provide resources for children and parents to assist them in preparing for college. Hosting events in which parents/guardians are given informational videos and/or literature about how students gain, access, and complete college. Educating care-takers of the importance of family support and how it can be instrumental in gaining access and graduating from college. Nuclear family and extended family can work together to help children navigate the path for college interest, graduation, and career obtainment. Implementing a family college resource guide that can be shared and utilized by all family members which would involve family members who attended college, providing students with tips or tours focused around their specific college.

Theme 3: Involvement in organizations and upbringing. Another important element revealed in the study included the idea that one's upbringing or culture was highly influential in achieving success. A few participants reflected on the idea of early principals and lessons taught throughout childhood playing a part into their completion of college. One participant noted that good mentors and friends, and social groups encouraged him to do well and were viable resources that helped him graduate from college. Similarly, a few participants reported the support of friends and like-minded peers as notably helpful. This theme was consistent with the literature, reiterating the importance of social capital.

Recommendations. Students should be encouraged to become actively involved in organizations in the school and community. Discussing the importance of structured activity groups with parents is essential. Schools can mandate school-wide participation in groups offered through the colleges/universities or neighborhood organizations. Having these groups within the school would allow students to gain access to different organizations and resources. For instance, one school in Camden City, NJ. mandates all students as part of the curriculum participate in a group meeting on a weekly basis with an organization covering topics around health education.

Theme 4: College as an expectation. One theme presented by the majority of participants was the expectation of going to college. Many participants indicated the importance of college being the next step and how it appeared more consequential than improbable. Many participants spoke of college as the next logical step following high school graduation, an expectation reinforced by their parents and/or family members, schools, outside organizations, friends and themselves. Participants gave various reasons

about the importance of college and expressed the belief in needing college in order to obtain a career and be successful. As reiterated in research, African American college students place high value on income and financial stability. As consistent with the Morales (2010) study that suggests moving up in social class was a powerful influence on African American students' desire to be successful in higher education.

Recommendations. It is important to consider what needs might be addressed to further African American males' commitment to education. Brooms (2014) noted the importance of schools establishing classrooms for African American males where the environment counters the stereotype of African American males as unintelligent, uneducable, and dangerous. Instead African American male images should be showcased as positive. Schools can provide more academic and social support as well as role models for African American males. Parents can participate by having college paraphernalia regularly accessible and available around the home. Parents can also encourage participation in activities that are in close proximity with college or offer connections to colleges. For instance, students who participate in sports might discuss being a participant on the team of a certain college. Parents and students alike can research, tour, or participate in a sport event offered at different colleges so that they can develop an affiliation to a school or university as an expectation that they belong.

Schools may bring college into the curriculum in a number of ways. Bulletin boards regarding college, designated hallways after college related organizations (i.e. alpha, delta), orchestrating college fairs, and/or adding college to the school name (i.e. preparatory college elementary school). Schools should integrate the vernacular of college into the everyday lives of the student in elementary, middle, and high school so

that the student is already familiar with the aspects of college, ultimately developing the mindset of college being an expectation.

Theme 5: Self-motivation/ self-determination. A strong sense of self-efficacy is helpful in African American students surviving in residential and educational environments that they perceive as hostile, in which they are often faced with micro-aggressions (Gaylord-Harden et al, 2015). Many participants in this study expressed a need to be successful. This need to achieve, along with a strong sense of self-efficacy, motivation, and determination was demonstrated by the responses of many of the participants in this study, and validated by the literature as a key component in success in higher education settings.

Recommendations. Florsheim, Tolan, and Gorman-Smith (1996) noted that when African American males feel more connected to their environment, they are more likely to have higher levels of racial identity and self-esteem. Participating in activities that require resiliency such as sports can aide African American males in developing self-motivation and determination. Schools can provide school-wide assemblies or workshops focused on teaching strength-based resiliency. Foluke (2001) highlighted the establishment of African American male immersion schools designed to address specific concerns involving students who are at-risk. These schools are designed to address the unique needs of African American males and to increase self- awareness, self-respect, and self-esteem.

Limitations

Participants. There were two possible limitations to the study. One limitation involved the selection of participants. Since the sample size was small results should not

be generalized to a broader population. Over half of the sample of participants were from a specific location in the northeastern United States. All participants attended school in Pennsylvania, with the exception of one who went to school in southern, New Jersey. All participants were from urban communities and shared a similar lower- and middle-class socioeconomic status. Participants common location and socioeconomic status may reflect participant exposure to higher instances of risk factor and lack of access to potential protective factors as a result of city ordinances. In addition, a majority of the participants were from single-parent homes with the exception of one. In addition, the majority of participants interviewed were raised by their biological mother so no information was gathered regarding African American men who were raised solely by a father, male figure, grandparents, or other guardian. These factors suggest that the findings cannot be generalized and may not be a comprehensive representation of experiences and perceptions of all African American men.

Investigator bias. Another limitation to note is the possibility of investigator bias as the researcher created the survey and interview questions as well as collected and interpreted data. The data analysis along with the researcher's great deal of interest in the topic may relate to possible investigator. The researcher may impart bias when making interpretations and drawing conclusions from the data. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The ultimate goal of this research was to identify protective factors that influence the decision-making process and completion of African American men who graduated from a 2-or 4-year college program. Prior literature pertaining to African American men

focused largely on underachievement, this study attempted to highlight the achievement of African American men providing a platform to share their journeys toward achievement while simultaneously disproving the notion that African American men are underachievers often in crisis. Hence, ten successful African American who graduated from either a 2-or 4-year college were interviewed and their responses yielded insight to several recommendations for future research.

The importance of higher education in the African American community is a major area for future research, specifically the discussion of what role communities play in elevating the importance of college. Research can focus on determining how communities and schools can effectively help African American students feel more supported in their pursuit of a college education. As aforementioned, there are a number of recommendations in which communities and schools can implement college awareness geared to African American students, however research should center on whether these recommendations have produce positive results. Researchers can look at the trajectory of successful college preparatory mentorship programs that focus on creating pathways of opportunities for African American students and determine their effectiveness. Data centered around African American students who graduated from college and were involved in these programs can be particularly resourceful. The next step could focus on how African American girls, in particular, achieve success. It could be speculated that similar themes will present. Analyzing the similarities and differences between protective factors across genders may lead researchers to gain greater insight into the experiences of African Americans.

Conclusion

Parent-adolescent relationships, behavior control, expectations, and responsiveness have been linked to psychological well-being and academic achievement outcomes among African American youth. African American men face a comparable difference in risk experiences and more obstacles in their efforts to achieve. There are a host of risk experiences that result in a significant amount of variation in academic achievement and overall success for African American boys and men (Kim & Schneider, 2005; Varner & Mandara, 2014). Although research proposes a number of factors that are related to those risks, the overarching research question for this study was what factors contributed to African American men graduating from college.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, useful information can be extracted from this study. The following themes were uncovered related to the achievement of the African American men interviewed: financial obstacles, support from mother, family, and friends, assistance from teachers, mentors, and other school personnel, involvement in organizations and upbringing that promote higher education, college as an expectation, and self-motivation/self-determination. Several of these themes were consistent with the literature in having a positive impact on the outcome of African American males. As such, several recommendations were developed as possible steps to action.

Family, specifically, parent support played an effective role in the completion of a 2 or 4-year college program. Educating care-takers of the importance of family support and how it can be instrumental in gaining access and graduating from college is beneficial. Nuclear family and extended family can work together to help children navigate the path for college interest, graduation, and career obtainment. Discussing the

importance of structured activity groups with parents is essential for parent engagement. Parents should be encouraged to become actively involved in organizations in the school and community. Participating in activities that require resiliency such as sports can aide African American males in developing self-motivation and determination. The idea of college as an expectation also played a viable role in many of the participant's completion. An important concept to consider in future research is whether embedding the idea of higher education in the lower grades would result in an internalization by young African American males of the goal of pursuing higher education. As many participants disclosed, college was viewed as an expectant. This expectation was not only one they had for themselves but was reinforced by families, schools and peers, and key to feeling confident enough to pursue their journey even when presented with challenges. Helping young African American boys view higher education as important for the continued advancement of their community can be viable. The results of this study suggest that despite being exposed to insurmountable risks, African American men are able to graduate from college and succeed. This research and other studies that focus on African American males serve as a source to improve the quality of the systems within which African American males exist, ultimately contributing to their progress.

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Appendix A



PHILADELPHIA • COLLEGE • OF • OSTEOPATHIC • MEDICINE

INFORMED CONSENT FORM**TITLE OF STUDY**

How African American Men from Challenging Backgrounds Beat the Odds and Graduated from College

TITLE OF STUDY IN LAY TERMS

African American Men Beating the Odds

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to find out factors that have contributed to the success of African American men.

The inclusion criteria for this study includes:

Male

African American

2 or 4-year college graduate

Exposed to one of the following conditions/situations: low socio-economic status, non-blue ribbon or low performing school, and/or single-parent/guardian upbringing.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you may meet the criteria. If you do not meet the criteria, you cannot be in this study.

INVESTIGATOR(S)

Principal Investigator: Dr. Yuma Tomes
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic
Medicine
Department: Psychology

Co-Investigator: Dr. Virginia Salzer
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic
Medicine
Department: Psychology

Address: 4170 City Ave.
Philadelphia, PA. 19131
Phone: 215-871-6946

Address: 4170 City Ave,
Philadelphia, PA. 19131
Phone: 215-871-6476

Responsible (Student) Investigator: Valisha Terry, MA.

The interview you are being asked to volunteer for is part of a research project.

If you have any questions about this research, you can call Dr. Yuma Tomes at (215) 871-6946.

If you have any questions or problems during the study, you can ask Dr. Tomes or Valisha Terry, who will be available during the entire study. If you want to know more about Dr. Tomes' background, or the rights of research subjects, you can call the PCOM Research Compliance Specialist at (215) 871-6782.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURES

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview and will be asked a limited number of questions. The interviews typically take 60-90 minutes and will be conducted at your convenience at an agreed-upon location.

The interview will be tape recorded (with your permission) to be transcribed at a later time. The transcription serves as a record of the responses to the questions so that the researcher can analyze the content.

Recording interviews ensures accuracy of the responses. The recorded responses and transcriptions will be kept confidential and there will be no personally identifying information contained within the recording or transcriptions. You will be identified only by way of a pseudo name, thereby assuring you will not be personally identified as a participant in the study.

The interview session will take about 60-90 minutes. There will be 1 session over the course of 1 day, for a total of 90 minutes of your time with a follow up (in-person or via email, if necessary). A follow-up will only be necessary to clarify any initial responses.

Topics that will be addressed through the interview include whether you were raised by a single or both parents throughout childhood, the type of community you were raised in, education, and exposure to anything that may have influenced your current achievements. These topics will be explored as each experience may result in a significant amount of variation in academic achievement and overall success for African American men.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

You may not benefit from being in this study. Other people in the future may benefit from what the researchers learn from the study. You will play a major role in helping other researchers, social workers, and psychologists in understanding the experiences of African American men who have overcome challenges and graduated from college.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are minimal risks associated with your consent and participation in this research study. It is expected that most participants will not experience difficulty with the interview. However, if you experience discomfort and it is difficult for you to continue, you can indicate that you would like to stop the interview at any time. If necessary, the contact information for a local psychological clinic will be provided.

ALTERNATIVES

The other choice is to not participate in this study.

PAYMENT

You will not be paid for being in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information and records relating to your participation will be kept in a locked file. Only the researchers, members of the Institutional Review Board, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will be able to look at these records. If the results of this study are published, no names or other identifying information will be used.

REASONS YOU MAY BE TAKEN OUT OF THE STUDY WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT

If health conditions occur, that would make staying in the study possibly dangerous to you, or if other conditions occur that would damage your health, the researchers may take out of this study.

In addition, the entire study may be stopped if dangerous risks or side effects occur in other people.

NEW FINDINGS

If any new information develops that may affect your willingness to stay in this study, you will be told about it.

INJURY

If you are injured as a result of this research study, you will be provided with immediate necessary care.

However, you will not be reimbursed for care or receive other payment. PCOM will not be responsible for any of your bills, including any routine care under this program or reimbursement for any side effects that may occur as a result of this program.

If you believe that you have suffered injury or illness in the course of this research, you should notify the PCOM Research Compliance Specialist at (215) 871-6782. A review by a committee will be arranged to determine if the injury or illness is a result of your being in this research. You should also contact the PCOM Research Compliance Specialist if you believe that you have not been told enough about the risks, benefits, or other options, or that you are being pressured to stay in this study against your wishes.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You may refuse to be in this study. You voluntarily consent to be in this study with the understanding of the known possible effects or hazards that might occur during this study. Not all the possible effects of the study are known.

You may leave this study at any time.

If you drop out of this study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

I have had adequate time to read this form and I understand its contents. **I have been given a copy for my personal records.**

I agree to be audiotaped and to participate in this research study.

Printed Name of Subject: _____

Signature of Subject: _____

Date: ____/____/____ Time:_____AM/PM

Signature of Investigator or Designee_____

(circle one)

Date: ____/____/____ Time:_____AM/PM

Appendix B

Are you an African American male who has graduated from college despite various barriers?"



I WANT YOUR INPUT! PLEASE SHARE YOUR
STORY!

Valisha Terry, a doctoral student in the school psychology program at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine is conducting a research study on African American men who graduated from college. Your voice is important! Please contact me at (215) 460-7681 for additional information on how to participate in the study and make your voice heard!

valishate@pcom.edu (215) 460-7681 valishate@pcom.edu (215) 460-7681 valishate@pcom.edu (215) 460-7681 valishate@pcom.edu (215) 460-7681

APPENDIX C

Survey Form

Please answer the following questions.

Do you identify as African American?

Yes

No

What was the make-up of your family during childhood?

Identify the income of your family while growing up.

Under 25,000 26,000-50,000 51,000-75,000 76,000-above

Did you receive reduce or free lunch while in high school?

Was your high school considered a blue-ribbon school?

Yes

No

**A blue-ribbon school is defined as a school recognized for academic excellence.*

Did you graduate from a 2-year or 4-year college program

Yes

No

If so, was it a 2 or 4 year?

Name _____

Phone Number _____

APPENDIX D

Script

Greetings! My name is Valisha Terry. I am a doctoral student at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM). I am conducting research on how African American men from challenging backgrounds beat the odds and graduated from college. I have been interested in what contributes to the success of African American men for a while as I have seen those who have achieved success and those who have been unsuccessful in my own life. Hence, I would like to know what makes the difference. My goal is to help African American men from similar backgrounds beat the odds and prosper in life. This study will help investigate factors that lead to the pursuit and completion of a college education which will hopefully contribute and motivate those who are currently at-risk, ultimately, creating more positive outcomes for the African American community. I know you have expressed an interest in participating in the study and I thank you. I want to answer any additional questions you may have and reaffirm your interest in participating in the study.

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions Protocol

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

Query-what challenges have you faced in high school?

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

Did you have violence in your community?

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me other examples of you being poor or low income?

Why did you decide to go to college?

Query- specifics in what helped? What influenced you to go to college?

What part of the country did you attend college?

Why did you choose that area?

Was the location beneficial?

What college did you attend?

Query- If attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Query- Did anyone attend college in your immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister)?

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

How do you define success?

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

Query- Why do you feel that you are not successful?

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

APPENDIX F

Interview Transcript**Interview 1 Norm****What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?**

Well, one thing about it I kind of knew that I was below the eight ball (laughter) because there was things there that people knew that I didn't know I had to learn those things, number 2 I mean it was financial, if I wanted to go to school I had to pay for it and if I couldn't pay for it I couldn't go to school at that time and I had responsibilities

Yeah well yeah my mom was a single-family person so I did I had to work I didn't sell drugs or anything like that so I had to work and uh time was a factor since she was a single parent mom that kind of really curtailed... I would have to pick up my sister and things like that.

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Well I went to school here (Camden) so it was kind of capped, yeah in some cases yeah because the resources weren't here the resources was at ..read the question again... well we was encapsulated so everybody here so I was thinking it created challenges for me in the fact that my circumstances was mostly everybody else circumstances.

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

I had a support system of professors, well black professors who I kind of really took ownership of us kids, there kids, I had a good network of friends who helped me we helped each other assisted each other then I just basically refused to be denied and I

understood what was out there so that was kind of like a resource for me I had the drive to want to succeed.

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

I'd say it was more so a blue-collar community whether it was Philadelphia then we moved to Camden for the most part everybody in my neighborhood for the most part we worked so it was blue-collared.

Did you have violence in your community?

Uh I can't say we did it was not that hard violence that you can't walk out in the street or you get shot no we didn't even we lived in here in Camden we lived in the Fairview section of Camden and that was pretty nice we was scared of East Camden

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

No

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

Why did you decide to go to college?

Because I knew it was something I could do first of all I credit a Different World and Bill Cosby because it kind of painted a picture of what I didn't know college was I was going to go to the military and I did go to the military but I'm an intellectual and I was like that's the place that's for people like me I'm a thinker I'm trained to think and for I want to do I knew it would either be psychology or law both of those things required a college degree.

What part of the country did you attend college?

Here I went to Fairleigh Dickerson in Eatontown, New Jersey then I transferred to Richard Stockton College in Atlantic City

Why did you choose that area?

They paid for it and I had to pay for school I wanted to go to Virginia

Was the location beneficial?

Yeah because it was commutable and it was reasonable as far as price at the time Stockton was the cheapest school in the state of New Jersey

What college did you attend?

Fairleigh Dickerson and Richard Stockton College

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

I did financially, my mother was very emotionally supportive and when she could she would help me financially but I knew and I told you I had to do that on my own

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yup first one in the whole family, first one in four generations

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

Well yeah one of the things my mom did was try to she knew people and she used those relationships to help me

How do you define success?

That's a life well lived, living a life well lived, a life that you can appreciate, saying that you can appreciate it basically and being content in your life. You feel like I'm content, happy, doesn't mean you have to have everything you want but you got everything you need

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yeah

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

Jesus. Actually, I will say this and this actually belongs to that being grounded well my belief in God but being grounded in the foundation and understanding that its bigger than you it's bigger than what you can see

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

Well I mean I guess it was some years prior to I was in the military and they sent me to Germany and from Germany I went to Paris and got onto the Eiffel Tower and I was like look at me a 19-year-old kid from Camden and Philadelphia gets to sit actually on the Eiffel Tower and I'm actually speaking French the French I knew was a little but I was speaking French and I never really thought that I would be able to do this but I'm doing it and I was like wow

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

The drive to want to achieve I wanted to but also I had a good network of people who was there for me, family, friends.

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

Put all your eggs in one cart and go ahead and do it don't worry about whatever your background situation just go on and do it and if you fail so what you fail you just get up from that point and you keep on doing it

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

You feel like that degree is so far away and you get up on it and you're like I'm about to get this bad boy I'm really about to have it like even now I can taste it and feels daunting but I'm like I'm about to be called doctor they about to call doctor and it really means something not just hey what's up doc. I think it's big to achieve a thing ..the achievement of what you think behooves you and I hate to say a lot of time we believe that well we know that we have to jump some special hurdles to get any of this stuff and when you like I jumped through them hurdles now how you like me now

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

Yes

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

I had African American teachers in Philadelphia let me see in high school both male and females in middle school it was mixed... Philadelphia was very much a black town back in the day it kind of depresses me now because my lawyer, my doctor, my dentist, the store owner, the what you call him, they were all black and I see it now and I'm like what happened because that's all I knew they were black folks we were a working black community even this town (Camden) this thing has changed because I remember when I was in school we had a bunch of black teachers I saw me there I knew I could be a lawyer because I saw a black lawyer I knew I could be a psychologist because I saw black psychologists and they were brothers they were men so it was commonplace to believe that I mean the Cosby Show wasn't that farfetched in my idea

Interview 2 Cal

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

I went to a predominantly white university where African Americans were relegated to mistreatment and minimized so I thought that that was one a second thing is that I don't think that I was adequately prepared for college academically I wasn't prepared and third sociologically I wasn't prepared for college so that was some of things I faced when I went to college I was 16 most people were 18, 19, 20 years old and I just felt like they were so much older than me that I just didn't blend in or fit in so that was some of the things I graduated from a small school went to a large school for college so it was a big deal.

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Absolutely you always feel like a second-class citizen you always have to prove yourself your never given the benefit of the doubt and every time something goes wrong the first person they look for is someone African American to blame the difficulty on

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Perseverance was the one thing that helped me graduate, my mother was another thing that helped me graduate she was a teacher and she had expectations that I graduate I mean that was just a foregone conclusion that I was going to college I never even questioned it I think also going to a private high school all my friends were going to college and that was just the next step so it was an expectation that you go to college it was no other expectation except that so those were some of things I had a cousin who had his master's degree my mother had her bachelor's degree, people in my family all had degrees so it was an expectation .. Yes, my mom helped me financially although I took out student loans, she encouraged me, had trusted me, believed in me and that helped and

then I was a member of a fraternity then all my fraternity brothers were expected to graduate so they had these kinds of expectations for me for us. I had an aunt who went to college who was about 75 or 80 years old who believed in me, I had a cousin who was about my mother's age who also believed in me so all of these people believing in me helped me and then my own fear of failure would not let me quit

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

I grew up in multiple communities the earliest community I can remember living in was a small African American community in the south and I remember those people there were carpenters, plumbers, electricians, priest, preachers, morticians, school principals all of them were black ..it was just a black well educated group of people who I was growing up with until I moved to Philadelphia

So how were things different in Philadelphia?

A lot of people didn't have education where we lived at and a lot of people thought that going to school was stupid and I just never figured that out

Did you have violence in your community?

Yeah there were gangs and stuff like that in my community

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

Sometimes I participated in it and then I made a decision I guess when I was 15 years old that I was no longer going to be in a gang and I was no longer going to be dysfunctional and disruptive and I decide to get myself together to go to college

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

No

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

I never had anything free but I can tell you that there was one other person who was very influential to me it was a family friend but really it was my dad's cousin he was the dean of a college in Holley Springs, Mississippi and he was considered to be a doctor of biology so he also had high expectations for me and Wilfred was a mentor, a friend and encouraged me I wanted to be like him

Why did you decide to go to college?

It was expected it was what else do you do well of course you go to college

What part of the country did you attend college?

Pennsylvania, Northeast

Why did you choose that area?

Well it was really a mistake a few friends of mine wanted to go to Penn State I didn't know very much about Penn State and so they said let's all apply to Penn State we'll get rooms together and we'll be okay I had originally planned to go to Princeton, Brown, or the University of Pennsylvania and I was admitted to all of them and when my friends said that I said okay, applied, got in and then they didn't so I wound up going to Penn State because I felt like if I did go to Princeton or Brown or University of Penn I wouldn't be able to handle it financially from my cultural experience like my family didn't have that kind of money

Was the location beneficial?

No I hated it, it was the worst experience of my life, it was less than 1% African American there and it was a harsh harsh environment you couldn't even a black person couldn't even get a haircut when I went there

What college did you attend?

Penn State

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

My mother

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

No I am not according to my dad we have a cousin who's a neurosurgeon, I had an uncle who was a superintendent of the schools in West Virginia, just about everybody in my family went to college, my father went, my mother went, my grandfather was supposed to have been a pharmacist as far as I know as a matter of fact he was supposed to be a medical doctor as well

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

My mom was the predominant person in my education, my mother was a single parent, my parents were divorced when I was three, my mother told me whatever I want to do just do it just be good at whatever I wanted to do so she didn't choose what area I studied in but she encouraged me

How do you define success?

Having a goal and achieving it whatever that goal may be as long as it's positive and constructive and socially appropriate I think that's success

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

I think I'm pretty successful but I can do more

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

My culture I attribute my success to my culture I grew up in a culture in which success was important.

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

When I awarded my doctorate

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

Perseverance I just wouldn't quit they wanted me to quit and I wouldn't I'm not quitting I don't care.

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

I would tell them to make sure they have social capital people around you who support you family capital people in your family that support you and then have internal resources that drive you forward.

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

Graduating

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

All my teachers were African American up until the fourth grade when I became the first African American kid to attend an all-white school in my city and they spat on me and called me obscenities and the tv cameras were there so all my teachers my first grade teacher was Ms. Henderson, my second grade teacher was Ms. Collins, my third grade teacher was Ms. Krump, and then my fourth grade teacher who was my first white teacher at an all-white school was Ms. Stephanie and I loved Ms. Stephanie because she

kept me after school every day for fighting and she worked on my math and taught me stuff so when I was punished it was a learning opportunity.

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Yes, they were caring and supportive it was a sense of inclusiveness.

Interview 3 Tarik

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

Um that's a pretty good question I guess um I don't know, not really it wasn't really a challenge but I guess getting used to being on your own for the first time. I always got along with people I can't really think of nothing that was a challenge you know what I mean.

Did you have any economic challenges?

Oh well that's definitely a challenge but no I didn't because I had a job so I had a job at the giant so you know I had a little bit of money in my pocket.

What challenges did you face in high school?

No not really, I got along with everybody the work wasn't hard you know what I mean it was a breeze I wouldn't do it again though

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

No not at my school though because my school was in favor of African Americans actually if you went to my school it was free if you was African American exactly so I know it was a little animosity between the white students and the blacks because they knew we was going to school for free and they was paying so I don't know if that question really applies.

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Well my stepmom she's a big supporter and my grandmom financially she was sending me like a hundred dollars a week to help me out she paid for some of my books so yeah like family

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

It wasn't the best community you know some drug activity some gang activity you know what I mean and home life wasn't the best but it wasn't the worst either

Did you have violence in your community?

Yes

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

I seen the violence and I wanted to know the outcome I wanted to know the reason why like after the violence occurred was it going to be a plus or minus and if it was going to be a minus I didn't want to partake in it but if it was going to be a gain then I'm okay with the violence.

Did you do anything when you saw it?

I just watched I didn't join in or anything.

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

Um it meant everything because growing up my family didn't have a lot of money so going to lunch and having free lunch it helped out alot

Why did you decide to go to college?

It's funny because coming out of high school I didn't really have a plan and a friend of mine he had suggested this school to me and I checked it out you know I put the application in and they accepted me and then I found out it was free and that was like an extra plus for me to go

It was like I don't know I didn't really have no plan coming out of high school so that Kind of dropped in my lap and thank God it did because it helped out a lot

What part of the country did you attend college?

Pennsylvania, East coast, Lancaster

Why did you choose that area?

It was just where the school was at I don't know like I said before I didn't have a plan it just came together

Was the location beneficial?

Um yeah I think so in a way because it wasn't like a big city with a lot of distractions and stuff so I think that helped out a lot it was a small little city

What college did you attend?

It's called Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology

Query- If attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

Step mom and grandmom and other family supported me too but they was the main two

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

I don't know, yes

Did anyone attend college in your immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister)?

No

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

No (no parent involvement)

How do you define success?

Like I don't always think success is about money it's about finding your happiness that type of thing for me I'm always in a good mood because I feel like it was so many things against me growing up and stuff that I shouldn't be where I am so I'm so grateful for where I'm at that I'm always in a great mood so I already feel like I'm successful and I don't have much money or nothing you know what I mean

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yes, I do

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

I guess it's what I just explained like uh life could have turned out so differently for me so like the way it did turn out I'm grateful for that and that makes me happy so I'm always in a good mood and I feel like your happiness when you find happiness then your successful.

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

Um I don't know I guess I started feeling that way I guess after I graduated high school I started feeling like I was successful I don't know because there's still more you can do I guess but I feel very successful right now.

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

I don't know myself, being diligent with work and you know that type of thing and I guess it was a couple teachers that looked out and helped me but for the most part I feel like I did everything myself

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

Um that's a good question I think I would tell them to you to stay positive and to keep an open mind there's a lot more out in the world then probably what they think and to don't fear to try stuff just try stuff you know what I mean um and that's about it

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

I guess graduation and then feeling like you I felt like I was ready to start working in my field and everything so that felt real good to me and graduating of course and receiving your degree it was like a time we actually build a house so it was a time we was working on the house with other classmates and I was doing so stuff and I noticed that I knew more than my other classmates I don't know if that sound cocky or anything but that was something that was good too

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

Yes, I had multiple

Did you, Men? The principal was African American and my English teacher was African American. I had a lot of female African American in middle school, I don't think I had none in elementary school though nope I don't think I had no African American in elementary.

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Yeah the one guy Mr. Jones he use to tell us like he use to tell the young guys in the classroom that it's a lot of stuff that's going to be against you going to have to fight a lot he told us it's going to be like you swimming up current alot and its going to feel like and you know I guess he was trying to prepare us you know for growing up being black

Interview 4 Aaron**What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?**

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

I really didn't face any challenges

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

No not really

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Nope not really

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Other than let's see I guess we can start with my mother of course uh financial aid uh support of friends and that's about it honestly

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

I'd say a lower SES but a hard-working community, church going community, there was mostly single parents but it was a good community not too much crime.

Did you have violence in your community?

No, not much I didn't have a chance to get to the part that where I said uh even though I went to an integrated school and overall the community was integrated uh mostly right in my area we were mostly black well African American like you say.

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

The only violence I saw was just kids fighting regular kids fighting but that was it no gunshots no stabbing no I didn't see that

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

That I didn't have to pay honestly that was it but I will say though by the time I got in high school even though I could receive it I didn't choose to get it felt better to pay for lunch that was the one thing so I paid for lunch in high school

Why did you decide to go to college?

Uh to get an education for a better life I always knew I wanted to go to college I always knew I wanted to play football or basketball in college though but that didn't work out but I still knew I wanted to go to college either way I was going to college

Query- specifics in what helped? What influenced you to go to college?

No not that I can think of

What part of the country did you attend college?

East coast

Why did you choose that area?

Good question, money that's the only thing as far as a challenge that I can think of as far as college that prevented me from doing something because I wanted to go away to college but I didn't have the money or my mother didn't have the money to send me away to college

Was the location beneficial?

Yeah it was beneficial it's not what I wanted but financially it was beneficial yes

What college did you attend?

I went to Montgomery College which was a community college in Maryland than I transferred to University of Maryland in college park where I graduated from.

Query- If attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

My Mother

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

That is a good question, honestly I'm not totally sure I'll tell you why my father did go to college while he was in the military but I can't exactly remember if he finished or not if he got an associate my mother didn't go to college but I can't remember if my father did or not honestly

Did anyone attend college in your immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister)?

Oh, yeah all my brothers went to college

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

Uh well my mother raised me my father wasn't necessarily there he was around financially I guess uh but so he didn't really have much other than uh actually I was going to say he helped me buy a car unfortunately he died a week after I got the car so I will say my stepmother did pay the insurance on the car while I was still in college so that is what she did but in terms of just overall support my mother supported me yeah that was it.

How do you define success?

Uh being happy with your life, job, your family being able to do things that you want to do like take vacations when you want to take them or hang out with friends and being healthy I guess those kind of things.

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yes for the most part

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

I think education is one of the things for sure because it's given me the income to do things and provide for my family and I think being around other people some friends growing up with friends that I had and friends that I had in high school and college just being around them not necessarily leaning on them but just them being there and still having friends to this day and then of course my family itself

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

I'm thinking of a time when I went to Hawaii with my family during spring vacation about 12 years ago but here's the problem with that about 4 days into it or 5 days my grandmom passed away so I'm having a good time not a great time but a good time and I enjoyed the weather and she wasn't sick but my aunt had passed away a couple months earlier so that kind of made her sad and the bad thing about it though the trip was planned for a long time but I really wanted to go visit my grandmother in Georgia during spring break and that's what I wish I could have done instead of being on that trip but I had a good time until I found out about that

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

Having a job that allowed me to work and make a little bit of money because I didn't need much money but it gave me a source of income so I can pay my car note, I could eat well, and I had a lot of flexibility as far as time was concerned so it didn't really impact my school time but it gave me just enough so I can have a little bit of pocket change plus gas was a dollar back then so and that was high.

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

Oh that's a good one, so I would say be flexible and I'm talking about education I guess that's the advice you talking about be flexible in what you want to do in life because your major that you may choose may not be the one that you really want so it's okay to change your major but then find out and ask questions about what your major is going to get you when you graduate if you a psychology you need to get a master's degree a 4 year degree is not going to get you anywhere and also take advantage of the school resources and that's one thing that I wish I had done more of whether its tutoring whether its advising on internships or just during intermural volleyball take advantage of that time your education will be better.

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

Umm I would say the freedom the freedom to go to school when I wanted to go to school choose my own schedule and the freedom to hang out with friends from school because by that time I had a car I didn't have a car in high school so you can go take 2 or 3 classes a day maybe work a little bit then you can do what you want to do and a little pocket change so that freedom was a lot

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

In middle school, I had one I don't think I had one in elementary school now when I was in school because I'm much older than you we had a middle school that was fifth and sixth grade but our junior high was seventh, eighth, and ninth and in junior high school I did have a couple of black teachers, yeah I had a couple of male teachers just a couple

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Uh yeah I remember them fondly all of them all of the male black teachers were good teachers and I got along with them.

Interview 5 Kyle

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

I would probably say financial aid I was financial aid challenged that's why I had to take out loans.

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

In high school, no not really

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Absolutely

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Family and church

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

Predominately African American and I would probably say low income, economically depressed community/

Did you have violence in your community?

Yes

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

I got away from it.

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

Elementary and junior high, initially I was embarrassed but eventually you got away from it because everybody was on it.

Why did you decide to go to college?

I think the push from my mom and teachers that I meet along the way.

What part of the country did you attend college?

Delaware

Why did you choose that area?

I was predisposed to them through a Christian education conference that they hosted.

Was the location beneficial?

Yes, it was conveniently located I could travel back and forth from home if I had to although I stayed on campus.

What college did you attend?

Delaware State University

Query- If attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

I felt the quality of the education and the black experience would benefit me more.

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

My mom

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yes

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

Uh she was a disciplinarian actually and she supported every endeavor I ever took upon from elementary to college you know she was there

How do you define success?

In my ability to give back to others

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yes

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

I would say my faith in God and my principles I grew up upon by my mother

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

The collegiate success of children and mentees in my life

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

The church and mentors I had mentors

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

I would say you have to be patient and humble and willing to learn from someone else

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

I would say becoming president of the student government association

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

Yes, black males, this one particular teacher was kind of consistent throughout I mean even up until this day we are still very good friends

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Absolutely I think he saw untapped potential in me in junior high school and from junior high school up until this day we are our lives have been intertwined.

Interview 6 Damon**What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?**

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

I was there 5 years so I worked a total of 4 years but my first year I didn't work so I had to work to pay for books I would pay for different things that I wanted and needed and help my mom out with different things that she was paying for by herself so I helped her out with the electric bill gave her some money for groceries and things like that another obstacle I think I guess just dealing with a different environment I came from high school that was majority white people than I got to a more diversified environment which was good for me I don't want to say that was an obstacle but it opened eyes to how the real world really is and how I would have to adjust how I was accordingly by being in that new environment.

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Uh I don't believe so not for me for me I'm a strong believer in what I give into it is what's going to come out for me I don't think uh just because I was African American it created challenges uh I believe if you're an individual who has aspirations of getting where you need to be in life then you can just follow those aspirations and it doesn't

matter what race, color creed you are you have to put yourself set yourself the best way forward and I didn't think by just being African American it caused any challenges for me.

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Well the help of tutors, asking for help from any teachers or anything like that or how to improve on my studies I guess straight out just using the library I had just using the many resources that were available for me in college, library, laptop, using peers and teachers. My mom she really supported me she is a single mother she was only able to send me \$70 every two weeks that hence forced me to work which I didn't want her to kind of be stressing about paying bills especially when she just brought a new house so overall my mother supported me the most uh whether it was trying to financially or whether it was just giving me that support that I needed to continue to overcome different stresses and things like that when you're not doing well at school and certain subjects your struggling with just speaking with her allowed me to get through and also helped me to graduate.

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

My community I grew up in the hood I ain't going to hold you so it was very poverty stricken a lot of people didn't have many resources and hence that's why I lived with my grandparents so it wasn't the middle class I can definitely say you know the low-income type of environment so I don't know how you can put that out I grew up in the hood so

Did you have violence in your community?

Absolutely

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

In most cases if it wasn't violence that had to do with me I turned the other cheek. I minded my business I didn't tell on anybody or anything like that I just kept going on about my business I didn't care as long as it didn't hurt me or my family I was all good I just turned the other cheek and went about my business.

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

I think they had a program for me I'm not sure if I'm correct but I think they use to give free tokens to get to school if I'm not mistaken I think they had that program for me. No, I appreciated it when I didn't have the extra money to get to school that just helped me get to school now that I got at least I got free tokens to get to school.

Why did you decide to go to college?

Actually, from my mom one reason why my mom really wanted me to branch away and go to college I was the first male to go to a 4-year college um I had some cousins who got their associates degree but uh I was the first to get my 4-year degree that was a great achievement for me and honestly just to move forward and hopefully get the necessary tools to maintain a career.

What part of the country did you attend college?

I attended college in the United States, Pennsylvania and Upper Darby

Why did you choose that area?

West Chester was just close enough for me that I could commute when I wanted to but far enough that my mom didn't know what I was doing so that's why I chose West Chester.

Was the location beneficial?

Yeah, the location was definitely beneficial to me because like I said I had the resources that I could go home when I wanted to and it only took about 45 minutes to an hour to go home so if they needed me I could just jump on a bus and go home

What college did you attend?

West Chester

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

My mom you know my aunt and different members of the family it was just so that my mom was the biggest influencer or supporter

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yes, for a 4-year college, my mom got her associates degree, my dad did not go to college

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

My mom was really involved financially and emotionally I could talk to her about my frustrations and honestly ready to drop out she would always tell me to pray and just try to keep your head up as much as possible and you'll see your way through it and that's ultimately what I did

How do you define success?

Success is accomplishing goals I think you have a goal a day to accomplish and if you accomplish that you're going to be successful at everything you do or in life whatever goals you have strive hard to achieve those goals and if you don't get to the goal try to just set it again and try it again I think finding success is accomplishing your goals

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yes, I was able to accomplish a lot of my goals I graduated from a 4-year college also received a Master's degree from a 4-year college as well as I'm currently in a career path as far as my career is concerned so yes, I feel like I'm successful.

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

Determination, having a lot of people in support of me, and just having the perseverance to overcome uh difficulties and obstacles

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

When I was able to achieve my Master's degree while also in the same year starting in a new career path so I was able to get the Master's degree and get into a career path that I thought would benefit me in the long run.

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

Support of family, friends, staying focus and that's it really nothing else really nothing that I can think of

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

Continue to set goals continue to persevere in order to achieve goals and uh having that determination and grit to accomplish those goals would be my ultimate advice keeping your best foot forward and accomplish your goals

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

I would say meeting the friends in which I call family now and obviously crossing that finish line and achieving my goal of getting a degree

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

I did have an African American teacher in Elementary school yes, my 4th grade teacher was an African American female.

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Yeah, she showed me how to be a leader as an African American in general, what leadership looked like because you know she was the only African American there everyone else was white so I got a chance to kind of see how it was to be a leader and a figure that's making positive influences in the community while teaching individuals on a consistent steady basis so she taught me what a leader looks like in my community

Interview 7 Bobbie

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

I think because I didn't go to a great high school just making the adjustment to the academic life you know just adjusting to some of the academic challenges because I know my first year in college wasn't the greatest.

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

Uh well I went to a tough high school where I guess it was a lot of violence and the academics weren't the greatest and uh I guess socially it was not the greatest I went to Thomas Edison high school in North Philly

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

No matter fact I think they kind of it ..it kind of was an advantage for me because like I said I went to Cheyney as undergrad and uh I think it was geared to helping students who didn't have strong academics so it helped me to increase my academic skills I went to University of Pittsburgh for grad school and I thought that Cheyney was harder than

Pittsburg but it was one of those things where um being African American helped me with my tuition because they were looking for African Americans I guess to try to make their school population more diversified so I got free tuition and things of that nature so that was an advantage for me in grad school

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Uh mostly my family, I had a brother who encouraged me to go to college, and I guess I had some sisters who just helped me out financially when I was in a financial bond then there were a few professors I guess who saw some light in me and encouraged me

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

I grew up in North Philadelphia it was a low economic community a lot of fathers weren't present even though mines was present a lot of violence in the community gang war was rapid when I was growing up back when I was a teenager in the 70s so uh it was rough.

Did you have violence in your community?

Answered

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

Most of the time you ran because you know folks was shooting and doing all kinds of you know maybe a crowd of 25-30 people chasing another crowd or chasing you so you did your best to get out

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

Uh it wasn't a big thing I mean sometimes we ate school lunch and sometimes we had a few dollars and brought our own lunch so it wasn't a big thing

Why did you decide to go to college?

Uh I got talked into it somebody influence me you know I had a brother who influenced me to go to college because I had no interest in going to college

What part of the country did you attend college?

On the east coast in Pennsylvania for both undergrad and grad school

Why did you choose that area?

It was closer to home I guess and I didn't want to go too far away from home and plus Pittsburgh was giving me money so

Was the location beneficial?

Yes very. I guess a lot of times getting home-sick it was easy getting back and forth to school and home that was good

What college did you attend?

Cheyney for undergrad

Query- If attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

Well initially I did apply to Temple but I guess everything didn't fall into to place and Cheyney accepted me so I went to Cheyney which I'm glad that I did because it gave me the opportunity to strengthen a whole lot of my weak academic skills

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

Well really like I said my family I got grants for uh you know tuition but whenever I was short I had sisters who always came through and helped me out financially

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yes, because my brother and I were the first to go to college.

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

Well they didn't complete high school so there thing was hopefully you'll finish high school but it wasn't a push to finish high school and college was something that they didn't even imagine that their children would participate in

How do you define success?

Uh just setting goals and being able to reach some goals I know a lot of people define success as making a lot of money or whatever and sometimes when you define success like that you feel like you're a failure if you don't make a whole lot of money so just setting goals and reaching some of your goals

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yes, I consider myself to be successful

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

Umm I guess just family values you know just some encouragement that I got from different people within the community, family members, teachers over the years, so just that encouragement that I got from different people.

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

Probably when I graduated from college because I never thought that I would attend college or graduate college so just graduating college that was a major accomplishment for me.

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

Well like I said family and some teacher or professors who believed in me probably a little more than I believed in myself

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

Uh your stronger than you think you are, you can achieve more than you think you know so just try to look beyond your circumstances and because things are bad now they don't always have to be bad you can always improve your situation

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

Uh music because I played the guitar as a kid and it wasn't until I went to college that my music uh really developed I started playing with other musicians and performing.

You were in a band?

Yes

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

Elementary school I don't remember African American male teachers I might have had a couple of African American female teachers.

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

No but later on I think in junior high or high school there was an African American male teacher who I feel had a positive influence on my life you like I said I think they saw more in me than I thought that I had and they kind of pushed me

Interview 8 Tyrone**What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?**

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

I ended up going to community before going to LaSalle for a year because my mom said she couldn't send me and my brother to college both at the same time. and then when I got to LaSalle I didn't like it was a whole bunch of racial stuff happening like just people just different it was just a whole lot of underlining racism and you know it was a couple situations that we got into with a couple of our classmates then I was an education major so like people weren't really communicating with me like I really didn't communicate with a lot of people like I wasn't friends with a whole bunch of people because they just wasn't open so I had a lot of problems .. I like my LaSalle experience but I didn't like being an education major.

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

Yes it did because like I was saying it was just difficult when I went to Roman like the white people I meet at Roman were totally different than the white people I met at LaSalle like they were more they were racist people I felt like they were racist and they were really cliquish like I didn't play sports but a lot of my friends you know a lot of black kids did play sports so I was chilling with a lot of those guys you know I wasn't Don Juan I didn't play sports so I didn't fit in with the rest where the rest of the black kids fit in so I had difficulty that way I went out with a couple of girls but I didn't really fit in like those guys fit in so I had difficulty then I was in a major where I was the only black man no I was the only black person in my major yeah I was the only black person in my major

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

So I think two things my best friend he played basketball at St. Joe's so I spent a lot of time at St. Joe's and then most of my friends played basketball so most of them and they all went to college so it was like that helped a lot it was like we were all in school together and my best friend at LaSalle they were black and we all went to school so it was like even though I was by myself in my major those other guys all graduated they all went to school so that helped and then I was about to drop out and my older brother was on drugs and he broke into our house and stole all my stuff so he stole all my possessions so yeah at that point I was like I had finished up my next to last semester before student teaching actually it was my student teaching semester and I wasn't going to go back to school I was going to drop out. I ended up going to Korea for the summer because they had this program where student could go and I was one of the two students from LaSalle that went and I came back and it just changed my whole mindset about different things and my student teacher mentor was actually the security guard at LaSalle and he helped me out a lot and from there my last semester I got all A's and that's why I started doing stuff.

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, my mom did a lot of community stuff my mom was into politics so my neighborhood for the most part was safe it was all working class I never missed a meal, my mom use to babysit when I was younger a lot of people would come over so it was like a place where people hung out so people would grow up and come back and visit so it was a safe place I really didn't feel in danger

Did you have violence in your community?

No I mean a couple of people growing up in the neighborhood got killed or they were on drugs or they robbed people or whatever but it wasn't like other neighborhoods around here like I can think of two or three people that got killed growing up and the first one I was maybe 19 and a couple when I was in college but it wasn't like half my neighborhood was killed.

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

I saw a guy get shot my cousin was driving and right next to our vehicle was the express way and heard a pop pop pop we saw the guy walking down the street and all of a sudden we saw blood coming down his leg and he just started running out of nowhere and he was like I couldn't draw my gun and so I saw that and also my senior year me and one of my friends was at a club and this guy got killed inside the club when we was there and as we was coming out one of the guys drew a gun on us and they let us go we had to hold up our hands so we could get out but the guy drew a gun on us so that was the most violence that I had.

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

No, we never qualified I went to public school for 3 years and I never qualified for free or reduced lunch

Why did you decide to go to college?

I went to college because everybody else around me went to college I went to Roman and like everybody went to school and it was the expectation that I was going to college it was either military or college and I wasn't a military kid so it was like the expectation

was you're going to college you had to go to school ..from my mom, my god mom, going to Roman that was the expectation even the classes that we took like I was 12-2 which was college ready so their expectation was you have to go to school.

What part of the country did you attend college?

Philadelphia

Why did you choose that area?

I chose it because it was close to home and my mom even though we didn't qualify for reduced lunch we wasn't rich so I had to go someplace where I knew people and it was close to home I thought about going to Ohio State like once I left community like that was the only school I thought about going to but that was it I think Ohio State had the most black students so I was considering going there

Was the location beneficial?

Yea I think it was despite what happened at LaSalle I don't regret going there because people don't look at my Master's degree they look at LaSalle they say oh you went to LaSalle yea I went to LaSalle so it's more if people from around here then they look at the school so I don't regret it overall I don't like LaSalle I have some great friends there I have friends for life and that's the thing.

Repeated question

Yes, absolutely because it was close and all my friends went to school here in different schools and different people that we met here and then opportunities presented itself like my work when I was in school and when I got out of school so it was like more beneficial

What college did you attend?

LaSalle

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

My mom, god mom she went to LaSalle she got her Masters from LaSalle, my godparents, my friends that went to LaSalle with me you know they went to school too, they supported me.

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yes

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

My mom was like do what you got to do she wasn't into check my homework every night and doing all of that stuff like I think in like 5th grade 6th grade she stopped she was like do what you got to do.

How do you define success?

Success is whatever makes you happy and helps you sleep well at night

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Uh somewhat yes, I do

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

Family, friends, staying out of trouble for the most part, working hard when I need to.

Am I rich no but do I feel like I accomplished a lot I have I'm very fortunate in like I've had some good jobs I'm very fortunate that you know I've done things I love to do you know mentoring is a passion and a lot of the guys I mentored are doing very well so I do feel successful in that way so I feel successful but it's not like but I don't like to brag about it am I all the successful no there's a lot of things I could of done that I still need to work on doing but I don't feel like I'm a failure I never feel like I'm a failure

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

I think I felt the most proud when one of the kids I mentored got his MBA that made me the most proud, he was always smart but he got into a situation where he was in a drug house and they locked up everybody in the drug house except for him the only thing that saved him is that he had his college ID they was like what are you doing here and if he didn't have his college ID he would be in jail right now so then after that he got himself together, got married and got his MBA.. that meant the most to me because that was around the time when my dad was getting sick so to see him doing that made me feel good.

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

Because I liked it I'm the kind of person that I have to do something I like if I don't like it I'm not going to do well at it

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

Have fun, for every dollar you make save a quarter, experience the world and not just what you read in books, and make sure you got people around you that love you

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

When I graduated, I looked up and my mom was crying

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

5th grade I had a black teacher my science teacher at Roman was black my gym teacher at Roman was black and my English teacher was black

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Ms. H my 5th grade teacher because she was my first black teacher I remember she did a lot of useful stuff she was a Christian so she did a lot of useful stuff she did a lot.

Interview 9 John

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

So, did you face any challenges in high school?

Sheesh challenges or obstacles I'll try to start from the beginning because I had many of them I'm sure one big one obviously was finance you know figuring out how I'm going to survive this thing personally I feel like in the beginning it was discipline as far as managing academics and life on top of that stuff like that I would say maybe that's it.

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

No probably because I went to an HBCU so they were a lot more accommodating and understanding of the different things that we face

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Umm that's good mentors and friends, professors even in a way I don't know because they were distracting to but social groups it was just a part of the culture I think especially if your apart of a group or something that they encouraged us to do well just social groups.

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

I grew up primarily in Germantown until I got to high school uh so that's a pretty I think thriving middle class black neighborhood very community based so that was good for me to grow up with and see crime existed but I mean very low

Did you have violence in your community?

Yeah very low I mean juvenile crime I don't recall like too many cases of big time crime like robberies here and there

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

At that time watched

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

Query- Can you give me some examples of other experiences you would connect to being on free and reduced lunch?

Uh anything free I was happy so it just meant I didn't have to worry about what I was going to eat

Why did you decide to go to college?

That's a good question for me it was the only thing for one because it was highly expected from me but two I had the belief at least at the time that the only way to make something of myself was to have a college degree/education.

What part of the country did you attend college?

East coast, Washington D.C.

Why did you choose that area?

In a couple of ways, I feel like it chose me if I can determine I think that I was a city kid by the time I was in high school I was running all the streets so I think that D.C. still had an east coast city feel and I think it offered things that I never seen between museums, white house, and the U.S. government being present there period I don't know it was a new place for me to discover that was in a city

Was the location beneficial?

Absolutely actually what I liked about the location the most I tell people I feel like no matter what background or belief you have, religion, interest, whatever I think you can find a place there I truly feel like it's a melting pot so with that I feel like I was very much exposed to just a lot of different cultures and lifestyles that just informed me about myself yeah culturally I just think it was superb

What college did you attend?

Howard University

Query- If attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

I felt going there would be beneficial

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

Everybody, my mom, my dad aunts and uncles from time to time and sometimes friends that were in school with me

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yes, on my dad's side

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

Well before college my mom actually who works in education was very good in English and English related subjects so she was very much prone to help me with that my father was mathematics so don't bring anything else to him unless its math but by the time I got to high school I think I kind of tapped out of what they would remember so I can't recall them supporting me academically just mostly supporting me in ways so I can show up and perform well

How do you define success?

I define success by the act of pursuing or accomplishing a long-term goal

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

I do

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

I think throughout my education and coming of age I think I was armed with great mindsets and ever skillsets as far as leadership and team building and resilience I think those things have played probably a large part in my success

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

I would say now if I'm honest but no I'll do this at a time where I really thought I was most successful after college I pursued a full-time acting career and I began working regionally in theater until I started booking on broad way in New York long story short I almost got cast in a film like a leading role that was the moment where I just thought that I was you know I was like I made it but then I would actually that was a moment if I'm looking back now though I would say now I think I have a well-balanced life which is what I've been looking for.

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

One being broke and having a wake-up call responsibility I think started to become very apparent to me so I think it just promoted me more like I got to do well also I want to say my peers I think being amongst others who were pursuing higher education and I remember being around students who were doing like 50 things and making it look great that just stood out to me it gave me a sense of possibility of what I can be if anything

honestly I think that was probably my number 1 thing peers that's funny because I never thought of that but that's probably the truth.

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

I just throw out the things that are coming to my mind never be afraid to speak up as far as asking for help, always think long-term as far as making decisions, spend wisely, and don't forget where you come from and don't forget who you are.

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

A major opportunity where I had a chance to see myself anew I was granted the opportunity to produce a show with a budget of \$15,000 for a homecoming event and that was a huge deal for me yeah and getting through that successfully kind of opened up a whole new portal of what was possible for me.

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

I did and surprisingly I had two black male teachers and I can recall and two black female teachers

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

I wouldn't necessarily attribute unfortunately those were unfortunately plus I was a wild child so there's that but those were the teachers that I actually got into trouble with the most at least the male teachers the female teachers were actually both strict themselves but a little more to themselves so I can't really say not directly at least not in middle and elementary.

Interview 10 Ronald

What challenges or obstacles did you face in college?

I think just you know the peer pressure in terms of your appearance you know what it means the challenge of understanding you know what it meant to be black the misnomers that come with it just suggesting and being strong enough to stay true to myself so I think that was a huge challenge as far as I went to an HBCU so other than that I was very comfortable in my environment I thought that academically I was definitely well prepared so I didn't have any challenges in terms of transitioning into college life other than just interacting with my peers

Do you feel being African American created challenges for you in the school setting?

No not at all

Describe the resources that helped you to graduate from college? Who supported/helped you while in college?

Wow I think that my college the HBCU just really catered to providing you know resources and outlets in order to be successful so if you needed help with writing they had help there we had tutoring they had off campus activities so just the kind of things to engage you and motivate you to want to be successful the biggest resources I had was really just you know my mother who really motivated me to want to do well but never put pressure on me to go to college or even to never to go but she definitely wanted to make sure that if we were going to make this investment she wanted to make sure that I followed through in seeing it through but never put pressure on me so it was like college was important but it wasn't like life or death but she knew how important it was so she didn't put additional pressure on me like she didn't require that I work during the summer she didn't require that I work during my breaks so you know she wanted me to that was

my full-time job to be a college student so she provided the resources in terms of just like I didn't have a want for anything in terms of food, in terms of clothing that I needed not necessarily fashionable clothes but just the clothes that I needed if I needed something like a book or if I needed to go somewhere she provided that resource because her thing was focus on college because you're going to have the next 70 years of your life to work

Describe the type of community did you grew up in?

Like I said very interesting so I grew in Camden, New Jersey which was always identified as one of the poorest cities in the country but I grew up with my family intact up until I was 8 years old so I thought that compared to my peers I thought that we did really well for ourselves when I was going to school I definitely saw a difference once my parents divorced where I did notice that we were a lot more economically challenged to say the least I think when my parents were married it was two incomes coming in the house on top of the fact that my father kind of had a very illegal stream of income coming in on the side as far as a side hustle so we did pretty well for ourselves but then once they divorced and we had to live with our father we kind of saw the darker side of life to say the least and so we could tell that we were poor we could tell that it became more obvious what his side hustle was because we saw a lot more of the drug scene with him involved in it and people that he was around so we were exposed to a lot more we lived in a rougher neighborhood you know to say the least so I went from imagine going from leaving in Mt. Airy and not to say that every part of Mt. Airy was great but a nice part of Mt. Airy and now your moving to North Philly like that's the kind of environment I grew up in

Did you have violence in your community?

Violence yes

Query- What did you do when you saw violence?

We just knew to walk away to not just be around but I can honestly say for all the street-wise that my father had he was also street-wise enough to instill in us to just not be a part of it and so even though we may have seen it we may have seen it in school we may have seen it sometimes in the neighborhood I don't remember it as often as an issue you know growing up because I think that he was smart enough to teach us things about the street on what not to be a part of so he was the kind of guy that was do as I say not as I do so he was never father of the year but I always give him credit for that

In growing up, what did it mean for you to be on free and reduced lunch?

It didn't mean much of anything because everybody was on free and reduced lunch I didn't feel out the ordinary at all

Why did you decide to go to college?

I didn't know what I wanted to do with myself but I knew that I wasn't ready to work full-time because I didn't want to have a job I wanted to have a direction for my life and my mother had always talked about college it was always an option if I wanted it to be but I think it was more so a thing where she knew how hard her parents my grandparents passed away before I was born so I never got the chance to know them so she always talked about how hard things were for them in terms of growing up because they both drop out in the 8th grade to take care of their family so me going to college was something that she always didn't want to put pressure on me and my brothers but wanted to make sure it was an option for us and so she just wanted to make sure we picked an option that was affordable and quite frankly accommodating for the family so that

sometimes kids make decisions that suck up the entire resources of the family she just was not going to let that happen it had to be something that was accommodating for the family, affordable, but at the same time that didn't put stress on me or the rest of the family also so I saw my friends my senior year of high school just getting accepted to college to college to college and I just decided that you know what I want to go to college too you know and I had a counselor who pulled me into her office and was like what are you doing you know the only African American counselor who was like had a real conversation with me about the possibilities of me going to school and I really appreciated the fact that she pulled me into her office and like gave me the business and from there I started to notice everyone else getting accepted into college and I was like what am I going to do so that's what motivated me to want to go to college and then I was actually in my 12th grade Social Studies class and I looked at my teacher and I just you know I was the best C student he ever had but I loved the way that he taught the class how he had fun with it how he cracked jokes and was split between cracking jokes and being serious and no matter how much fun he had with you it didn't matter he still was very serious about you got to get this work done and I looked at him one day I pointed and in my mind I'm like that's what I want to do with my life and so that kind of emerged between being motivated by people my mom, my counselor to want to go to school to actually seeing a career that I could see myself actually doing so I'm here

What part of the country did you attend college?

Small college in southeastern Pennsylvania

Why did you choose that area?

Because it was an accommodating ride to my family and it was affordable, it was close by I can get home back and forth this wasn't cost prohibited for my family

Was the location beneficial?

Yes, absolutely so again if I had an emergency my mom could get to me I could get to her it really didn't cost us anything but an hour ride outside the city

What college did you attend?

Lincoln University

Why did you choose an HBCU over a primarily white institution?

I graduated from a primarily white high school at least it was primarily white at the time now here it is 30 years later it's no longer such so at the time it was very mixed so majority white but a lot of African Americans and a lot of Hispanics so very mixed some Asians so it was mixed back in the day I just wanted a very comfortable experience you know I didn't want to go to college and feel awkward but I knew at the same time I needed an opportunity to build my confidence so especially since I didn't have too many role models in my family of people going to college so I think I'm the third person in my family to go to college I think third maybe fourth and so they were like all older so like there were no other children or anyone my age I could relate to as far as school was concerned so I wanted to relate to kids just like me and it gave me the opportunity to build my confidence

Who supported you throughout your 2 or 4 years of college?

My mom that's for sure so without her I wouldn't even be here

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

No but I had a uncle her brother who again passed away before I was even born he was 26 of cystic fibrosis back in the day he made it to about 26 so you know he graduated from college and passed a few years after that my uncle who currently lives in Cherry Hill, New Jersey went to Virginia State so he has a degree from there so I was pretty excited that we talked about college every once in a while I have an uncle on my dad side who went to college well at least that's what they tell me but with that side of the family who knows if they're telling the truth or not and there's me my dad claims that he has degrees from college but my dad lies like rug so I can't even you know he and I have the same name and every time he tells me we have the same name I don't believe him I have to check my birth certificate to make sure it's true I love my dad growing up with him was never dull to say the least so as far as I know that I can verify nobody immediate

Tell me about your parent/guardian's involvement in your education.

You know it's interesting you know my mom was very hands off she laid done the ground work you know like in high school your supposed to get your work done and do what you're supposed to do because she's out here working her tail off every day and your job is to do the same so it was never really a focus on like I notice with my students here they always have to try and find job and work and focus on more than just being a kid and so she was really focused around us being kids and our education that was like it was in college you know so when it was time for you to go to college her mantra basically was like you can go to college but you're going to do all the work like you know your job is to understand everything your job is to explain to me financial aid how it works all the paperwork all she wanted to do was just sign she did not want to go through any major efforts because if I have to jump and bend over backwards to take care

of things that you mess up okay I'm not fixing anything you just won't be going to school so I was like okay well guess what I got to own this process and I can't afford to make any mistakes so if I tell my mom that I need \$435 to pay the gap for my semester I better have those dollars right she send me the money you know we paid the bill okay and then we move on to our books I had to get it right she was not going to spend the time to come up to the school because that's what kids do with their parents they make them come to the school or even at college when I talk to students they have to come up there figure out the financial aid, talk to the officers my mom was not doing any of that she was not standing in anybody's line, she was not calling anybody so if you want this you better figure out what I have to pay so that's pretty motivating to want to stay on track but once I got it right she supported and made sure it happened for me so if I need \$100 or \$80 for a book she made it happen somehow some way so she was definitely someone that was my main source of support

How do you define success?

Doing the thing that you want to do that you love to do where it doesn't necessarily feel like work so but at the same time you have the opportunity to not only do that and do that well but your able to share that with the world and it helps somebody else

Do you consider yourself to be successful?

Yes, because I have the opportunity to be able to impact other people's lives rather than just worry about my own so I am pretty successful as far as that is concerned and that's a privilege everyday

Query- To what do you attribute your success?

Investment from a lot of people very interested in my success people you know motivated me being exposed to a lot of people who were successful or who just were motivating individuals who taught me various lessons you know my family has a lot of issues with my father but they are lessons that he taught me that have really carried me through in life you know in terms of he may not have been the best role model as a man and/or a father but he taught me what it meant to be tough and independent thinking so how to be kind of street sav when dealing with people and engaging with people too because he had the gift of gab so how to be engaging with people you know my mom taught me empathy and caring for other people and also doing right by people and being as honest as you can so I had brothers who did not go to college but they supported my decision and as they support everything I do in terms of saying encouraging words you know all my family like that but also the people that my mom has exposed me to in terms of she did hair for 35 years and she used her tip money to pay for my tuition you know outside of my financial aid or put the money towards my books so she would always have me come to her job or when I actually had a job in her department store and I would come see her she would always make me engage with her customers her customers were predominately Caucasian older women so you know but that taught me how to speak with people and to mind what I say how I say it hoe I presented myself as a young man so I guess I never understood that until I got older and realized what she was trying to do you know so with her friends who some of them went to college so of them had been to different parts of the country whereas I mostly stayed within Camden, Philly you know these people had been places so I got a chance to engage with them I attribute my success just .. it's funny I just had a conversation this morning with a lady when I started with the school district

back in 2002 and she called me and I got a chance to thank her and I wanted her to kind of share that with everyone else that was in the offices downtown when I first started working there to say thank you because I've always had a lot of people who saw me working very hard to do well and those people were invested in my success by teaching me and being open to helping and mentoring me you know point me in the right direction so I think I attribute all that to my mom just giving me a solid foundation, my dad weaponizing my personality to be a strong individual and using that to be trying to be the best person I can be and people seeing that and wanting to invest more and more of their time and efforts into the person who I was and wanted to become

Give me a time you felt the most successful?

About a year ago I was in my mom's living room and we were talking and she started to discuss her parents, my grandparents and we were just talking about things about my job or whatever and she looked at me and said I can't believe you're a principal she gave me this weird look and said I just can't believe you're a high school principal I said I know she said all the things you're doing if my parents, your grandparents could just see you now they would be so proud because it would make them reflect on things that they experience, why they did the things that they did to push them they all had to graduate from high school at the very least because you know back then you would graduate from high school and go straight into a job for the most part so and college was an option because clearly her brother, my uncle went but it wasn't like they had to but they insisted that at the very least they had to graduate from high school it wasn't even a thought so to see me now not just to have a degree and a career but to have several degrees and also just to have you know this career in particular like she just really started to kind of get

teary-eyed because she was thinking about her parents and how proud they would be so I think that's probably felt the most successful because I validated my mom's efforts I made her proud and she felt as though that I made her parents proud

What helped you in your efforts to achieve in college?

For a young kid who is used to growing up in urban settings I just loved the idea of an HBCU, the environment, people from similar backgrounds not to say you can't get the same thing from any college but for me just a kid trying to build his confidence and a kid trying to find himself I just felt like the HBCU environment just really enhanced and allowed me to build the confidence I needed and go out into the world and go after whatever it is I wanted to go after so that helped me succeed I was just very comfortable in college from day one so I was pretty excited again you want to have a lot of friends you know whatever so I was never really popular with the girls that's something I had to work on but as far as interacting with people period was very comfortable to me and that helped me to develop my people skills, interacting and investigating now initiating contact with people those things are very helping and at the same time allowing me to feel comfortable in terms of being smart at least try to be smart anyway try to pretend I was smart

If you were to give advice to someone from a similar background, what advice would you give?

I always try to focus our students around just a couple pieces of advice which is that it's okay to be selfish in terms of thinking for yourself, making it about you and so being selfish doesn't mean you ignore everything or that you suck the air out the room being selfish in terms of always putting yourself first because there has to be a certain point in

your life where you have to start putting yourself first you know me leaving home and knowing that I wanted to go after this degree required me to have to put myself first and insist that my parents come and help me to try and pay for this they didn't have to I was 18 years old considered an adult 17 really but I put myself first because this is what I wanted to do so that's important I think it's important to always know that the hardest thing you'll ever have to do is to do the right thing you have to kind of be your biggest advocate, you have to go after what you want and not fit anyone else's agenda I think that that's a huge issue with a lot of our young men and women growing up which is that they're so busy trying to fulfill someone else's agenda which is why I say put yourself first and be selfish you really kind of have to be independent of thought and understand the importance of being your own advocate so those are probably the top three things I would say to people because they're very important our kids are highly influenced with what they see what they read online and with what they experience with peers every single day I see kids make mistakes not because they believe in those mistakes but because someone else believes in those mistakes so we have to start teaching our kids how to be independent thought in understanding that just because you're doing something wrong doesn't give me the right to respond the wrong way so the hardest thing you'll ever have to do is the right thing how do you respond correctly to a situation even when someone else is doing the wrong thing that's not an easy thing to teach but our kids are trying to learn that

What was the most rewarding part of your college experience?

I have friends for life I have four friends that have been my friends for life I meet them in 1990 and we've been friends ever since

Did you have an African American teacher in elementary or middle school?

Yes, actually believe it or not I've had a number of African American not males African American females a bunch of them because so I grew up most of my schooling was in Camden, New Jersey as I mentioned and so I remember clearly most of my teachers were pretty much African American females I had no male teachers until I got to high school

Query-Did this teacher have a positive influence in your life?

Absolutely what 5th grade Ms. Turner loved her are you kidding me we loved Ms. Turner if I knew where to find her now I would hug her to this day before I transitioned to middle school she made me feel as if I was the best student ever I had the best 5th grade year it was so much fun I loved 5th grade you know so I remember 5th grade very clearly and Ms. Turner Whittier Elementary school which is now like a Mastery school they call it something else but yeah no 5th grade pretty awesome I loved 5th grade so I definitely remember my health teacher and its funny actually because before she retired I spoke with her and she remembered me 30 years later she remembered me she said she remembered every single student and when I said something to her she said I remember because she taught health and sex ed when I said my name she said I remember you I was like wow you remembered us that was the best class ever because you just laughed and giggled all day long because she wanted you to learn about sex and responsibility and the only thing you could do was talk about she kept it real we laughed all day so yes I just remember her to this day its interesting because it made class fun it wasn't until I got to Pennsauken that I started to see that I didn't have any African American teachers it was a suburban school technically so therefore I didn't have the luxury of having because the

one African American teacher that they had in the building taught history and I never had him so my only interaction with him was because he was the coordinator for the international club it was mostly African American students coming to him and asking him to form this minority club but we couldn't be even though it was majority African American students we couldn't exclude other races so it was more like a multicultural club.